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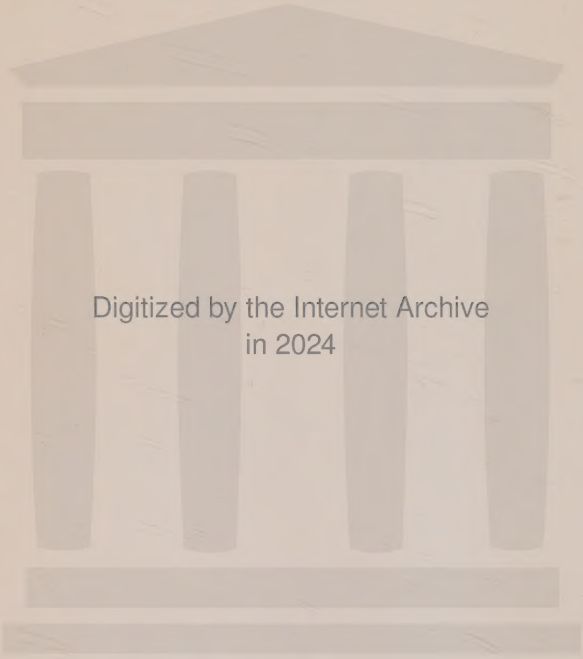
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INDECENCY AND THE
SEVEN ARTS

INDECENCY AND THE SEVEN ARTS

AND OTHER ADVENTURES OF A PRAGMATIST IN AESTHETICS

BY *Horace M. Kallen*

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To

JOE AND *LUCILLE*

Dearest Friends

and Too Kind Critics

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Preface

IN PRAISE OF THE MORTALITY OF PRINCIPLES

WHEN a man is absorbed in a fight or a love affair, the thing he is doing is the one and only thing to him in the wide, wide world. At the moment in fact, the dear friend or the bitter foe *is* the world. The rest—the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, the great globe itself and all which it inherit, are dissolved into merely background and perspective for the vis-a-vis. They signify only as sustainers or destroyers of the victory of love or war which is the present all-absorbing purpose of the man's life.

Than this victory, there can be nothing more momentous, more precious, more excellent. Alike in a pinochle game or in Flanders field, in a prize ring, a street brawl or a broker's office; alike in a roadhouse where the customer is called on to give the little girl a hand, or under the full moon with the ineffable She,

what helps the victory is good, what hinders it i
evil. Whatever the time, the place or the occasion, th
ends, the goods and the evils present themselves a
absolutes. The passions they enchannel and drai
tolerate no rule. They reject all direction, all com
promise, all adjustment and relation. While they las
it is inconceivable that they should lapse, and to hav
and to hold them renders the world well lost. A
such times it never occurs to the souls they overmaste
that a life is longer than a love or a fight. Becaus
for the moment the feeling and its object seem eterna
eternal they are called. In this wise a ruling passio
gets transformed into a universal principle, coerciv
for all men. It will, during its reign, transvalue all
man's world, until it has been dethroned by anothe
and probably opposite one that in its turn impose
eternity and the absolute. The King is dead, long liv
the King! . . .

If by some lucky stroke of chance, a man who ha
lived an abundant life comes to the serenity of an ol
age in which no passion rules because all are spen
and only a disillusioned intelligence stays sensitive an
awake, competent with the competency of long estal
lished habit, and endowed with the appearance
vigor which such habit always gives, he can look bac
upon his life and acknowledge the temporary an
relative character of the eternities and absolutes th

obsessed him. He can say of his biography what Goethe said of Faust: "This poem is like life; it begins and it ends and has no unity."

Should a unity be discerned in it, it would be such only as the backward look—the old man's own, or his biographer's—creates. For no future comes out according to plan. Will can not determine it or foresight define it. Even an idiot's life is filled with surprises, and to an intelligence change and chance are the normal weather of the daily round; the unexpected is the one event that is sure to happen. Perhaps it is for this reason, as much as for any, that the present moment feels eternal, that it is inconceivable that it should have not been and then become; monstrous that it should end and then not be. The events of a biography compose a succession of such eternities, each a beat of emotion, absolute beyond every challenge or denial. The swarming brood of time and circumstance, such unity as may be theirs by nature cannot be realized in consciousness or generated by the will. It is a culmination, not a preëxistence; a crowning occurrence, not an accomplished purpose, an eventual chance, not the outcome of the providence of a shaping divinity, ghostly or mechanical.

What is true of a personal life is even truer of a school or a cult, which rests upon the aggregation and the mutual give and take of personal lives. If a man

has a biography, a society, a science, or an art has a history. And this history is the tale of the generation of aggregated and warring absolutes, each claiming for itself exclusive validity and excellence, and therefore universal empire over the minds and hearts of men. Schools of art and cults of criticism also wear this crown of glory. Difficult as it is for their prophets and hierophants to believe, each of them falls under the obnoxious fatality of being born, of struggling for what will sustain it and enable it to grow into stature of power and prestige; of battling outward rivals and inward decadence, of postponing yet of finally succumbing to defeat and death.

For the food each feeds upon, for the bread and the wine of life out of which it builds its power and prestige, it depends upon the public. Without the public it would explode like a balloon in a vacuum. The allegiance and support of the public is what it in fact fights its competitors for. Yet all the days of its existence the school or cult takes on as if it were the sustainer and the public the suppliant and competitor. It lays claim to be the sole bearer of salvation. It proclaims its doctrine and practice as infallible absolutes, as quintessential truth and goodness and beauty, as eternal principles which all who would live and be saved must believe on. Its competitors are, of course, heretics and liars, to be rooted out of the earth. Their

can be with them no live and let live. To schools and cults their principles are absolute; the law of each is all or nothing, rule or ruin.

Whereas, in fact, they are changing items in a changing aggregation, with the same bearing on the whole as the motes in a Brownian movement have upon the liquid pattern they compose. Each claims for its special dispensation a universal and eternal monopoly which none, in fact, ever accomplishes. All, champion and setup alike, go down to defeat in the end, and their places are taken by others. If they differ from the individual, it is by the fact that they never die a natural death but are killed in battle or through desuetude. Schools and cults do not attain to an old age serene in disillusion. They do not come to the quiet places of remembrance. They never discern in retrospect the relativity and particularity of their claims to be universal and absolute. They die in their illusion of glory, the more vehemently thundering forth their eternal, ineffable validity as their powers fall before the enemy and the ghost that possesses them is expired.

To discern the origins of the schools and the cults, to search out their elements, how they come together, how they stay together, what they claim, what they do to make good their claims, how they do it, by what activities they survive and by what chances they

perish, is the function and the program of pragmatism in æsthetics.

It is the endeavor also of the essays and addresses which make up this book.

Although some of these essays were written only yesterday and others as long as twenty years ago, they consistently undertake to survey the field of Criticism and the Fine Arts from the pragmatic point of view. The eleven essays treat, broadly speaking, of four themes. One is the nature of the Critic and the Censor and the place of these worthies in the common life. The qualities and functions of the arts and their relations to the institutions and ideals of a community makes a second. The third is language as a medium of the creative imagination. The fourth is the nature and status of tragedy and comedy. Each of the essays postulates with reference to its special field the existence and power of a public. One cannot overstress the event that in the end it is the public whose decision determines whether a work of art or a school of criticism shall survive or perish; that schools of criticism absorbed in their warfare against one another, and movements in the arts absorbed in the development of their methods and realization of their purposes, behave as though their publics were not there at all or were passively waiting for their light and guidance. This is a delusion. On the record of history and of

biography, the public is always present, and actively present. An artist might conceivably produce and exist without a public. A critic never could. He is a middleman, he intervenes between artist and public and creates a triangle of which he is the third member. He is the complication in the life of art.

If these essays should seem to some schools of criticism to be *momento mori,* I shall not say them nay. For the credit of criticism and censorship as institutions of society, it is perhaps not ill that all cults now having currency should be deflated. For the credit of the arts it is perhaps well that there should be overt as well as hidden acknowledgment of the actualities which determine the status and function of the arts. These essays are only occasional and sporadic episodes of an adventure in a pragmatic philosophy of art which, I hope, I may bring to completion before too many years have passed.

H. M. KALLEN

INDECENCY AND THE SEVEN ARTS

I. *Indecency and the Seven Arts*

HAPPY America! The economy of our body politic is so like the life-system of a physiological individual that the process by which a poison stimulates its own anti-bodies into existence is repeated in another form by the woes and ways of our society. Here, for example, is that form of autointoxication known as the censorship. Just a short time ago it threw the intelligentsia into a fever by procuring the suppression of that amusing tract for the times, "Jurgen," by Mr. James Branch Cabell, F.F.V. Immediately a sanitary antibody to the censorship began to form, with Sidney Howard and Barrett Clark and Edward Hale Bierstadt as the chromosomatic center.

The tale of its generation, labors and consummation lies now before me. It is called "Jurgen and the Censor: Report of the Emergency Committee Organized to Protest Against the Suppression of James

Branch Cabell's Jurgen." It seems to have been privately printed — why privately is not said — for the committee. Reading it, one cannot fail to envy the good time the committee have managed to give themselves defending Jurgen and his Zeus-like parthenogenerator against the Censor. At least, Mr. Bierstadt has had a good time. No one can read the cadences, as of a liturgy enlivened by jazz, of his rosary of apothegms regarding "morals, not art or literature," without realizing that he is a modern knight with a spirit compounded of lofty sentiments and familiar manners, out on a joyous crusade against Crusaders. He does not, nor do his associates, think with Mr. Cabell that the Crusaders belong to the family of tumblebugs who "must live." If he did, there would not have been added to the small gayety of our world of tumbling empires and falling prices this merry report on "Jurgen and the Censor."

No; Mr. Bierstadt and his friends take the tumblebug as seriously as his Eminence takes himself and they join again the immemorial issue, old as Socrates and new as Lenin, between the arts and the decencies. They have set themselves to reforming law and organizing opinion. They have solicited authors and authoresses

to load their pens and to volley their inks, and by and large the opinions they have assembled are as diversified in force as they are variegated in quality. Their range stretches from the smug deliverance of Mr. Paul Elmer More, who is afraid that if he protested against comstockery-*in-actu* he might be giving aid and comfort to "what they are pleased to call art," *they* being a group of writers for whom he has no kindness, to the noisy anger of Mr. Theodore Dreiser who offers money for the cause, and demands that the State should defend the artist. Between these extremes is to be found every possible variety of sentiment: such as the practical respectability of the respectable Mr. Wister and the no less practical indignation of the anti-puritanic Mr. Mencken. Mr. Laurence Gilman, in the most epigrammatic and unkindest mood of all, writes: "With greatest pleasure. To hell with them on all counts."

Not to be accused of introducing a flippancy into a religious occasion I refrain from inquiring: "Why especially to hell, isn't heaven a more condign banishment?" Yet I can't help feeling that the occasion would have gained in liturgical power if others than the members of the profession which has most at stake in the controversy had been called upon to bear testimony,

and if the testimony had, in spite of dissensions of cult and dogma, not been so mutually corroborative. Mean persons, members of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, might say that on the whole the Report of the Emergency Committee embodies a congregation of special pleas by one of the parties at interest. Of course, it does not. Of course it simply, purely, absolutely is a demonstration in behalf of what Mr. Joseph Hergesheimer calls, with his usual sweet, sudden felicity, "the liberty of beauty." But evil tongues will wag, even at so righteous a crusade as this. The Emergency Committee can, however, call upon the devil to do the caring. Let the tongues of evil wag, certainly; and let the Emergency Committee by all means wag back as good as or better than it gets. Thus shall be fulfilled the Scripture: "As it was in the beginning, so shall it be in the days to come, forever and ever, amen."

For, looked at from an æsthetician's sidelines, the Crusade to liberate holy Beauty from Moralist the Infidel is the perennial counterstroke in an ancient and joyous tourney that gives not inconsiderable zest to men's lives; and now one wins, and now the other; but in the long run the joust's a draw. Why a draw and how a draw is the burden of this gloss upon the

knightly errand to set free "Jurgen" which I now take up, trusting not too hopefully to outrage neither Mr. Mencken nor Mr. Sumner, and to scatter grains of comfort that even Mr. More may peck at without fear.

2

WHISPER it in Gath, and tell it in the streets of Ascalon, but let not the dimmest murmur thereof resound in the halls of Comstock: *there has always been a censorship, and there has always been an anti-censorship, and everything has been censored, and everything has resented and resisted censorship.* Sometimes censorship has been done by States, yea, verily, States even anti-Puritan enough to call for no exhortation from Mr. Mencken — States like Imperial Rome, or Imperial Russia or France or Germany. Sometimes it was the prerogative of classes, like the patricians of Rome and the *Shlakhta* of Poland — neither bearing the slightest taint of the abhorrent middle-class morality. Always it was the purpose and the power of churches, the denomination being irrelevant and immaterial. Socrates, who was a victim of a censorious democracy, had a pupil, Plato, who censored the arts out of existence in his program for a state to be run by

the best minds. Paul IV, Pope and Holy Father of the Index, was a generous patron of the arts with Catholic tastes running to matters Mr. Sumner could hardly approve. The Star-Chamber ordinance which called forth Milton's "Areopagitica" was enacted by a high-church, bitterly anti-Puritanic government. The Puritanic government which succeeded it closed the theaters, but tolerated "Paradise Lost," and the government which reopened the theaters persecuted the author of "Paradise Lost." Tolstoy and Mr. Bernard Shaw are both puritans, and both lovers of art. But Tolstoy would undoubtedly have followed Plato in censoring most of the arts out of existence, and Mr. Shaw would certainly have followed Milton in censoring the censor out of existence.

Is it necessary to multiply the examples? The case of the censorship is neither so simple nor so obvious in fact as it is in controversy. In the matter of censoring, the arts are no worse off than anything else possessing qualities which compel men's interest and drive them to conflict. There are everlasting oppositions and confrontations, a ceaseless tidal rhythm. The censor ebbs and flows, whether in the ancient or in the modern

world, and he seems to work quite unregardfully of the particular agencies or the particular issues in any controversy. Puritanism, or any other *ism,* is only the accidental incarnation of his Protean spirit, which takes all shapes from Mah to Mahi that change and perish all while he remains.

That he remains is a symptom and a portent of a fairly perdurable interest or appetite in the constitution of organized society, of which he is the expression, gratification and incarnation. Where this appetite or interest resides is uncertain. It has been known to take up its habitation in a caste, a sect, an economic monopoly or an æsthetic bias. It has worn masks innumerable, according to the level of comfort or culture or knowledge or power on which it found sanctuary and freedom. It has its according fashions and its styles, its varying intensity, scope, manner, direction and objective. It has been Baroque as well as Puritanic, Pagan not less than Christian, noble as well as Comstock-like, and may easily become so again. This is the one wise perception that Mr. James Branch Cabell has contributed, amid much that is bitter, to the controversy which has been snapped into life again by his fanciful "Jurgen" and its adventures among the censorious.

Against the charge of violating the current morality of 1920 [writes Mr. Cabell] I think that any serious defense would be a waste of effort, if only because the question must so soon become of purely antiquarian interest. Our children may not improve, even from the standpoint of humor, upon our moral standards, but our children will certainly not retain them. When, as must inevitably happen before very long, our present ethical criteria have come to seem as quaint as those of the Druids or the Etruscans, or even as those of 1913 appear nowadays, offenses against any one of these outmoded codes will hardly be esteemed worth talking about. Should "Jurgen" be remembered ten years hence, it will, through being remembered, be amply exonerated: whereas if "Jurgen" be forgotten, the book will then, of course, be violating nobody's moral sensibility. Time thus lies under bond to silence, whether with praise or with oblivion, all these aspersions; and willy-nilly, I must defer to time.

There is the cream of the jest. The whirligig of Time has his revenges — on the censor, but — and here is where the jest turns sharper than a serpent's tooth and stings e'en Mr. Cabell — on the anti-censor also. Codes become outmoded, but that sensibility in men which these codes defend does not. Some things preserved by time — like some of the tales of Ovid or Aretino, though done with consummate art, were condemned, are condemned and probably will ever be condemned. Their outlawry does not come from their

violation of the "current morality." Their outlawry follows from the blows they deal to the sense of shame. This is the enduring attribute of human nature to which the changing and "outmoded codes" come as bulwark and as shield. What natural validity the censorship possesses accrues to it from this sense: what invalidity it exhibits comes directly from its exaggerations of the importance of this sense and of the social technique that has arisen in defense of it; from the perversions to which this defense has led, and the self-defeating weakness which has sprung from these perversions. They have been most notable and have counted most largely, in the civilizations of the world, as aspects of the Christian code. Under this code they range between the two poles of time set in the noble story of Susanna and the Elders and the not less noble culmination in the laws of Mr. Comstock and their self-dedicated guardians of our day.

3

How the sense of shame came into being is a problem for the metaphysicians among the psychologists. There are speculations regarding its value to the continuity of the race as a defense of vulnerable areas of the body, and there are other speculations. But for the purpose

of understanding the censorship it is enough to know that the sense of shame exists and that it reacts to its appropriate stimulus as do the other senses. This stimulus is the exposure or uncovering in one's self or one's friends of some quality or attribute usually protected and concealed. What is uncovered is ordinarily regarded as a weakness or a defect. The uncovering works as an assault upon or a degradation of the self or what is dear to the self. Whether in the public eye or in one's private thoughts, does not seem to make any difference; the exposure before the "censor" of the psychoanalyst can be as painful as the exposure before the public. In either case it is accompanied by feelings of discomfort and *malaise,* by movements of defense, concealment, flight, and other modes of escape from the exposure. These are the empirical constituents of the sense of shame.

What will arouse it varies with race, time, place and circumstances: categorically, with the customs of the country, and it is these, and not the shamefulness itself, which determine what is decent and what is indecent. They enchannel the action of the sense in particular ways, and direct it upon particular objects. While, prevailingly, it is aroused by exposure, by physical or moral

nudity, especially physical nudity, the exposure does not become indecent except in relation to specific social conventions and practices. Thus, in Japan, naked men and women bathe together unconcernedly; in Europe and America they may expose their backs, chests and limbs but not their middles. In the poetry of the Chinese and the Japanese love is far from being a conspicuous theme, and the nude female figure is practically absent from their plastic and graphic arts. In Occidental culture the case is reversed: love, particularly since the rise of Christianity, is the dominant theme of the poets, and the female nude a recurrent subject of painters and sculptors. Moral denudation — the exposure of greed, cowardice, dishonesty, or other moral defects seems, in Occidental countries, not to arouse anything like the resentment which is aroused by physical denudation: although the experience of shame may in such cases be the most intense men undergo, moral exposure is not regarded as indecent. The application of this epithet has been sequestrated by the custom of the western world to the denudation of the sexual, whether in flesh or in fancy.

For cause, if not for reason. Sexuality is one of the two major instincts upon whose activity the existence

of society depends. The despair with society, the failure of nerve and the loss of hope in which Christianity originated expressed themselves by a horror of the sexual, by outlawing its function and excommunicating its significance. Paul's exhortations and persuasions regarding the integrity of an ascetic discipline, already in his day a going concern with a decided limp, developed into an ideology and an institution which aimed to repress and dam up this most potent of the dynamics of conduct. Christianity thus established a conflict in the *mores* of sex, which heightened and intensified sexual sensibility and elicited proportional social repression and private imaginative utterance. Normally, the instinctive shame aroused by the exposure of the sexual would be enough to maintain the decencies. But the rigors of the new discipline brought into action, over against this shame, a continual ungratified lust, which partly overwhelmed it and partly compromised with it by finding expression in a theological glorification of love, and a mystical and ritualistic expression in the trances and imaginings of the saints, in Mariolatry and its accompanying phenomena. Numberless images, symbols and ideas, such as are used, for example, in Mr. Cabell's "Jurgen" and had been quite free of any

sexual import, became conventional figures for modes of sexuality, and got themselves incorporated as such in the great tradition of Europe. From St. Anthony to St. Catherine the saints show themselves in a tragic struggle against love's compulsion, with a life beset by devilish temptations imaged in visions and dreams replete with these symbols, and expressive of a sense of shame growing out of all proportion because of the unconscious conflict. This dominates not alone the innocent saints. It rules the poets and the painters. It turns the quite unerotic epics of the classic times — epics like the Theseaid, the Pharsalia, the legends of Homer, into exclusive love stories. It distorts moral perspectives and destroys moral values to such a degree that harlots like Cleopatra, murderesses like Medea, and others such, become "good" women because they are lovers with powers of long endurance, true, as Chaucer says in "The Legend of Good Women" that he wrote to praise them, in loving all their lives.

The prominence of the erotic and the nude in the arts of the peoples of Europe is thus no accident. It is the imaginative redressing of the balance of a social life weighed down by the hand of the Christian *mores*. If the defenders of these *mores* knew what they were

about, they would welcome and encourage rather than combat it. But they not only do not know what they are about; they find themselves solicited, in ways which make them ashamed, by that same insurance which the arts supply to the stability of their *mores,* namely by the practice of literary and pictorial denudation. But the nude of the Christian arts bears upon its innocence the brand of the cross. As it emerged, in the course of the Renaissance, in painting, sculpture, and letters, it was not the old impersonal nude of classical antiquity which merely roused the sense of shame. It was an individualized nude, more personal and fleshly. It not only roused the sense of shame, it lacerated and hurt it and overcame it. Between the Venus Callipyge and Titian's Venus of Ituro or the Sleeping Venus of Giorgione, there is a barrier of tradition and feeling which only genius could cross. The former, "indecent exposure" though it is, was to its public far more generalized in form and significance than was either of the latter to theirs. The same thing holds true of Ovid as against Aretino, or of the Bible as against Rabelais and Boccaccio. The difference is not one of content, or even of essential social form. It is as notable in the practice of the censorship itself. It is the difference between Purist

and Puritan, Plato and Calvin, Cato and the popes of the Counter-Reformation.

It is a difference, in short, in cultural tone, and this in any given period is determined by society's central interest. This interest throws all the items, events, institutions, emotions and ideas which make up society's body and soul into a pattern of constantly shifting equilibrium in the course of which the line between the decent and the indecent is constantly redrawn. To what degree exposures which arouse the sense of shame can be made without giving rise to the charge of indecency depends on the relation of such exposures to the central interest. Thus in our day and generation the Holy Bible, with its tales ranging from incest to mere denudation, is not only tolerated, but cherished as the code of morality divinely ordained and divinely revealed; "Faust," with passages as unambiguous as any in "Jurgen," is still not on the Index, while "Mademoiselle de Maupin" is; the Bacchante of Mr. MacMonnies is denounced as "a naked woman dancing in her shame," while the "true story" and confessional magazines are sold in their thousands to the masses.

And there you are. There are no rights and wrongs in the matter. There are only automatic conflicts and

adjustments. Modern society has none of the unity which the world knew until the beginning of the last century. It has yet no one central interest, such as made the glory of Greece or the splendor of Rome or the sadness of the Middle Ages or the exuberance of the Renaissance or the sweet reasonableness of the eighteenth century. Life for us has been comminuted and atomized. The division of labor in industry has been reduplicated by the division of labor in the professions and the arts. The moralist no longer utters the conscience of his community. The artist no longer gives its vision and aspiration their most desirable expression. Each utters himself, and himself alone, producing his wares for a market where he must compete with his fellow craftsmen for rewards. Each unites with his fellow craftsmen to defend his interests and privileges against the assault and encroachments of the other crafts. The "liberty of beauty," dear to Mr. Hergesheimer, is opposed to the straitness of convention dear to Mr. Sumner; "morals, not art or literature" is opposed to "art for art's sake." These are modern doctrines, not ancient. They stand for class interests, not a unity of culture.

That there was, prior to the Great War, a gathering

toward such a unity, a new unity, resting on quite a new common sense and pointing to a vision of life more secure, more serene, more self-acquiescent than the Christian, there is evidence enough. Whether, because of the war, this gathering has not lost force and momentum, it is hard to say. But for three hundred years science has been slowly overtaking superstition, has been making itself part and parcel of the funded mentality of mankind, renewing its faiths and redirecting its energies. One must not yield the belief that this progression cannot be arrested, that it must accomplish itself. When it is accomplished there is no doubt that the incidence and character of the censorship will regain the responsiveness to organic culture which passed from it with the disintegration of culture. Until that time, it will behave as it does. Meanwhile let the artist whose theme awakens the sense of shame so glorify it with beauty that the little hurt will be consumed in the great joy, and the generations will cherish his work, regardless. Such is Mr. Cabell's own view, and he appears to be not unwise in his generation.

II. *The Censor, the Psychologist, and the Motion Picture*

An address delivered before the Fourth Annual Motion Picture Conference, 1928.

ALTHOUGH the activities of the censor of the moment rouse in us emotions as fresh and poignant as a new wonder of science or a primeval achievement of man just brought to light, everybody knows that there is nothing novel in censorship, nor anything untraditional in the warfare which men and women of free minds and hearts wage against it. Censorship is as old as taxes, and as dodgeable by those who have the means; as familiar as babies and as surprising and burdensome; as various as religion and as sanctimonious and respectable; as inevitable as death, and as nourishing of functionaries who live on obsequies and burial. In short, censorship is an enduring activity of the social body, incorporated in special organs. Each country, each

people, each civilization has its particular forms and practices. Among the primitives it is identical with the enforcement of taboos — mostly sex taboos, rooted in the fear of woman, which seems so widespread and persistent an emotion along all steps of the ladder of our civilization. Taboos applying to other things call for enforcement too, of course, and enter the censorship. Among these, none stands out so curiously as taboos concerning names. In the primitive view the names of things are the life of things; and to be master of a name, is to be the master of a life. The heedless or malicious use of a name, especially the name of a chief or god, is blasphemy, an anarchic speaking full of menace to institutions and to men. The Chinese, the Egyptians, the Jews, the Greeks, the Assyrians, the Romans, had their several ways of insuring the community against the fear of the consequences of violated taboos of sex and religion. These ways were censorship.

Although the practice is universal and pandemic, the name for it comes to us from the Romans. Among them it is applied to an institution of government, set up as a division and specialization of the more general duties of political — in antiquity the same as social — rule. In the latter half of the fifth century B.C. the

senate and the people of Rome created two magistracies whose incumbents were invested with certain powers and duties which had formerly belonged to the consuls. These new officials were named *censors*. It was their task to keep a census of the persons and properties of the citizens of Rome, to classify them according to their possessions, to watch over their manners and morals, to examine into what they wore, what they ate, how they behaved themselves in public and private life. Where the censors found anything they deemed unbecoming to a Roman citizen, an offense to the moral or material welfare of the State, it was their duty to punish the offenders. They could prescribe what to do and what not to do, what to say and what to leave unsaid, the stuff and style of clothing, the quality and variety of foods. They could levy fines. They could degrade citizens from one class to another. No appeal from their power was possible; it was absolute. The institution endured with lessening prestige and influence, until the civil wars. When law and order were restored and the Emperor became the power of State, to be "the prefect of morals" was one of the rôles among the many he chose to play as the self-charged divinity who shaped the ends of the Empire.

The specialization of functions in the Emperor was signal of a division of labor and life in society. Society and the State ceased to be identical. Morality, especially sexual morality, became administratively separated from politics. Religion, which had been an aspect of public affairs and a function of government, became, in the long course of time, identified with a special cult laying claim to an exclusive monopoly on a uniquely true, infallible revelation of the will of God, the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of souls. The multiplicity of amicably competing cults were starved or murdered out of existence. Their place was taken by the one Universal Catholic Church of Jesus Christ which protected its monopoly by acting, so far as it was able, against the thinking, speaking or spreading of other teachings than its own. It took custody, also, of the enforcement of its special sex taboos. Where the pagan Roman censorship had only prescribed, fined or degraded, the Christian Roman censorship expropriated, tortured and killed offenders. Its activities were supplementary to those of the State, upon which it laid the obligation of carrying out decrees that required actions ostensibly taboo to its sacerdotal love of man.

With the invention of printing a new problem

faced established power, both ecclesiastical and secular. Printing enormously facilitates the spread of ideas. It puts a potent instrument of rivalry in the hands of the competitors. Of all arts, therefore, the printer's is, in the eyes of established power, the most subversive. To control the presses, to decide what shall be printed and what shall not be printed becomes a ruling passion of civil and ecclesiastical authority. After the Protestant Reformation heresies that have gained wealth and strength, and thus security and respectability, in their turn set up, or cause to be set up, censorship. The single police power against the violation of sexual and churchly taboos becomes a manifold one. To the only rule of the Universal and Catholic Church of Rome are added the several and various ones of its Protestant rivals.

The secular polities meanwhile continue to have their own taboos to defend. They fear "sedition." Sometimes they use the churches; sometimes the churches use them; sometimes they turn, one against the other. But whatever the division between them of the labor of censorship, they are unremitting in their endeavor to control the presses and the pulpits, and to let nothing be printed or preached but what they license. This is

their endeavor to this day — no less in revolutionary Russia than in traditionalist United States, no less in free England than in hidebound Spain. Ideas obnoxious to the ruling ecclesiastical or political order must not be uttered whether by word of mouth or by imprint of type, whether as a prophet's revelation or as a dialectician's conclusion; whether as the outcome of a scientific investigation or as the production of an artist's imagination; whether in a book, a newspaper, a picture, a play or what you will. If there exists a single country in the world where this is not the case, I am not aware of it.

But the conflict of the censors is the liberation of the censored. The impact of diverse authoritative standards upon each other takes the attention of their several beneficiaries and champions from the private citizen and leaves his spirit free. He can think his own thoughts and speak his own mind. He can find asylum with one censoring power from the persecution of another. Protestants preserve what Catholics burn. England shelters what Italy hunts, or Russia imprisons; France protects what England condemns; the United States holds up a shield for the lovers of liberty of all Europe — till the wheel has made its full turn and Europe

becomes a refuge from the oppressions of the United States. In these changes and chances of history freedom grows. Lovers of free thought themselves develop a solidarity of spirit, themselves create instruments of combat and aggression, organizations whose function it is to censor the censors.

By the time such engines take place amid the other furniture of society, the conflict of public censorships has so restrained the operations of the censor, that private, secular instruments of censorship are procured, by associations of men who know exactly what they want, to pick up the functions that states and churches have laid down, and to carry them on. This is especially the case in those societies where church and state have been divorced by constitutional prescription or the custom of the country, in societies, therefore, like the United States or England. Here private agencies to protect *taboos* against offense and to punish the offender multiply like rabbits. Their sacred cows are not merely ancient ritual or *mores* of cult and sex, but political orders, social economies and flags. To-day, when we speak of censorship we have in mind mostly such militant private companies, defenders of the faiths. But their power, when they have power, rests on the taboos

of religion and the authority of the state, sometimes through the inertia of the custom of the country, often through enabling legislation procured *ad hoc*. Companies like the Watch and Ward Society of Boston, Massachusetts, or the Society for the Suppression of Vice of New York, are for practical purposes arms of the police power, laboring with the prurient in the odor of sanctity, inspired by the Holy Ghost.

2

The history of the censorship lays bare its emotional dynamic. Its behavior patterns show to the psychologist that it has no other than an emotional dynamic. Its sanctions do not lie in the actualities of public welfare. On the contrary, the evidence of history shows that the periods of public well-being are the periods of personal liberty and social and spiritual toleration; such as the age of Pericles in Athens, the Augustan age in Rome, the period of the Medici in renaissance Italy and, in growing proportion, everywhere in the secularized western world since. The uses of the censorship are, on the record, limited mostly to some special interest, some local and particular design, in competition with its contemporaries. The censorship renders not public

but private service. It is a tool of selfishness applied in the interest of some particular person or group. And this selfishness is a blind selfishness: it aims, not at developing consequences, but at immediate gratifications, like a dog that aggravates by scratching the itch his action seeks to relieve. This self-defeating pattern is characteristic of activities whose dynamic is exclusively emotional.

Of the emotions that make of the censorship the thing it is, the overruling ones are fear, greed, and the sense of shame.

Every single one of its tools and organs — Index Expurgatorius (Roman or Bostonian), Inquisition, Licenser, Commission, Board of Review, Post Office, Police Official, Legislature — however authorized and whatever its organization, has for its drive a sentiment in which one or another of these feelings preponderates in some specific proportion. Each is a device for gratifying, projecting or otherwise relieving those passions. Each, in so far as it succeeds, purges and liberates its sponsors of vital strains and torsions, imparting thus more success to their lives. For the sentiments which animate censorships are not integrations or harmonies of mutually reënforcing emotions. The sentiments

which animate censorships are unstable balancings of reciprocally opposed and conflicting emotions. Greed in whatever form is an antisocial intensification of appetite; men are afraid and ashamed to be called greedy. And fear is a negative, devitalizing feeling. And the state of shame is unpleasant, constricting and inhibitive. The censorship releases sexual or other appetite in the name of good morals; it turns fear and shame into justifications for occupying oneself with tabooed objects. It enables its sponsors and protagonists to violate the taboo in the form of defending it. It consists in a preoccupation with the indecent and the blasphemous in the name of decency and the gods thereof.

This is why it ranks as an institution among the establishments of the common life, yet why, nevertheless, its forms are various and its proclaimed function is to police and protect the community; why it is a device which any group — a church, a form of government, an industrial corporation or any association of men whatever bound together as beneficiaries of some vested interest — may invoke to gratify its ends and not seem antisocial. Its premise is a certain assumption concerning the relationships between the groups that make

up a community, and concerning the patterns of their living together.

3

Among the relationships of associations of men to the institutions and corporate bodies of society, two appear to stand out. One makes men seem conspicuously the beneficiaries of the family, government, church, industry, property and the like; the other makes them appear not to be beneficiaries at all. To the beneficiaries it is most important to insure their benefices against dangers and conflicts of every kind. The censorship is worked as an instrument of such insurance. But the proclaimed aim of the insurance is not the true one. The true aim is to safeguard the source of benefits. The proclaimed aim is to safeguard the possible attackers of the source.

When a censor proclaims that a state of danger has been created by a book, or a painting, or a statue, or a motion-picture or a social or religious gospel, whose is the danger? His own? Never. Ostensibly, he is secure, he is beyond the reach of any subversive influence, an untouchable. The danger, he preaches, is the public's. The public, especially the women and children of the public, it is that must be protected. In the great

American public or the great Russian or the great Italian public, there resides, as their censors see them, a constitutional weakness of mind and character, a susceptibility and pliableness which render them too easily amenable to books and pictures and movies. Those may undermine the faiths, break up the habits of the public and demoralize them, endangering all the goods that exist in their company and by their acquiescence. Under the stimulus of ideas other than those of Communism or Fascism or Americanism 100%, may they not rise up and destroy Communism, Fascism or Americanism of the hundredpercenters? Protect them from such ideas. Under the stimulus of pictures of the nude human figure or a pregnant woman in profile, may they not rebel against clothes and become skeptical of maternity? Don't therefore — say the censors who must guard the investments of the motion picture magnates over whom Mr. Will Hays presides — in motion pictures exhibit the nude human figure or the swollen ventral profile of an expectant mother. . . .

The presumption is that the rank and file of mankind have a constitutional predilection for vice and rebellion, and can be solicited by works of art or science

or philosophy to instant surrender to a temptation to love or think or believe unorthodoxly.

This presumption is as gratuitous as it is traditional. It came in with Christianism, with its dogmas regarding original sin, total depravity and human incompetence for self-control without heavenly aid. It is borne out by neither the records of history nor the surveys of sociology nor the researches of psychology. On the contrary, what the sciences of man bring to light are the extraordinary persistence and continuity of the *mores* of society, the inertia and irresponsiveness of the individual mind, so that conduct ever lags generations behind knowledge and opinion behind invention and discovery. Thus mankind has failed signally to use the information of its sciences to the best advantage for furthering its own happiness, and like the miser that because of his miserly habits, stores his gold rather than spends it, lives according to the old folkways rather than by the new wisdom. To the beneficiaries of the old folkways, this is ethical idealism, but not to those who prefer happy to maladjusted human beings around them.

But, ah, cry out the moralists: Look at this case of a girl fallen because she had read a novel, of a boy turned

thief by contagion from a movie, of a workman blaspheming because a priest was portrayed in a talkie as no better than he should be.

Bunk! Sheer bunk! sheer superstition and rationalization. How many people are there who are afraid of starting anything on Friday or getting involved with the number 13! They cite cases of misfortune following the 13th at a table or an adventure begun on Friday. Such cases stick out. Such cases make a deep impression. But the endless millions of cases in which the sequence accrued without misfortune, or as likely as not with good fortune, are not so much as thought of. It is emotion, not intelligence, that can solemnly set forth reasonings of this type. They present all the stigmata of rationalizations — the elaboration of a single instance into a universal rule, the ignoring or suppression of contrary evidence, the high moral tone. One can observe them in full play in the prejudice of persons in power that all ideas (whether in works of art or in other media) which lack their sanction can be, or are, in themselves subversive. Thus great works of literature may be banned by a Boston censor or a post-office clerk or a customs inspector, while the Bible, containing the same tabooed stuff in more primitive and telling

form, is circulated to the limit, even by force. For the Bible has long been constitutional to the vested interests underlying censorships. Its frequent use in subversive ways for subversive ends is usually ignored. But that such uses of the Bible keep occurring is proof that this well-known and little read "Book of Books" is in itself neither subversive nor conservative. The user makes it the one thing or the other, and the user is moved to his devices by nothing in the Bible itself but by the conditions of his life. Conditions grow up which can render any book or picture or movie in the world dangerous to vested interests of mind and body. Times come when burdens grow too great, when starved bodies, imprisoned minds and defrauded feelings have brought the public to a breaking point. Then the Bible itself or the Constitution of the United States or any other sacred cow of a national life may first act as stimulus to rebellion; and then serve as the Paladium of all that explosive expansion of life which follows. The very pillars of an established order, æsthetic, intellectual, moral, are then subversive of it.

The phenomenon is not limited to states and cults. It recurs on any scale of group life. You can see it happening in the family, in the shop, in the bank.

Children defy parents and run away; workers go on strike — even the police of Holy Boston did it once; borrowers prefer bankruptcy, and so on. The event grows by summation of stimuli. One restriction, one burden, one starvation is laid upon another, until the threshold of endurance is passed. Then, heigh-ho! The total depravity of human nature, its unregenerate soul and its original sin become manifest in all their horrid features. But the long, long accumulation of repression and exploitation that finally loose this uprushing of evil is never thought of. For this accumulation is the measure of the advantage of the powers that censor, the gauge of their greed and its gratification. Conversely, the censorship is the meter of the flow of fear concerning the consequences of greed, and the register of the activity, normal and neurotic, of the sense of shame.

4

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Upon the sense of shame rests the one intrinsic justification of censorship which psychology can discern. The things which may arouse it are legion, but its most common stimulus is sexual exposure, direct or indirect. A way of feeling which the psychologist studies, the sense of shame shows itself under observation and analysis to

be one of the many forms and varieties of fear. It is the special mode of fear evoked, not by combat, but by uncovering or exposure. Such uncovering puts its object in a position of disadvantage, the feeling of which is shame. Now sexual exposure involves a biological disadvantage. This is why the ultimate intimacies of sex, among most animals as among men, are preceded by segregation from the group, and a search for the security of isolation. Society tacitly recognizes this and not only sanctions but enforces privacy. For the lover, unlike the diner, is caught, when uncovered at love, in a position not favorable to combat. He cannot so easily defend himself against attack. Hence, something analogous to the sense of shame may be noticed even among animals. Packs break up into pairs that travel far from each other and recongregate when the serious business of loving has completed its term. Among domesticated animals, especially dogs, contact with man has relaxed the sense of shame from sex but extended it to other things. And in man its scope has spread, through the progressive multiplication of conditioned reflexes, from the central interest of sexuality to the whole field of human activity. Any thing or event, simultaneous with or immediately succeeding the essential sex affect, may

become its surrogate as the stimulus calling out the sense of shame. In some parts of the world it is shameful to expose the belly and not the breasts, in others the breasts and not the belly. One society is shocked by naked feet; another by naked arms. The Mohammedans veil the faces and are not disturbed by uncovered bodies; we leave the faces bare but would find an "evening gown" which lays a woman nearly bare to the waist, shameful in the morning but not after sunset. Puritans will bundle but not flirt, their Victorian descendants will flirt but not bundle. . . .

And so on, in endless variety. The specific stimulus to the sense of shame has become a generalized one. Shame has ceased to be an unconditioned reflex and has turned, so far as social life is concerned, into an entirely conditioned one. The occasion of its activity is a matter of time and place and circumstance, of the *mores* of locality and period and generation. No single general rule can be laid down concerning those. The moral of the responses that are called the sense of shame points only to this thing as essential: that shame occurs whenever some unknown defect, some concealed source of weakness in a group or individual is laid bare and made known. The sense of shame is roused at any

diminution by such exposure of a man's vanity, pride or prestige even more than of his self-respect. It thus becomes a response to failure or deficiency of any kind according to the prevailing conventions of failure and success in a given social group at a given time. But mostly, in our society, it is associated with denudation or laying bare of sexual interests, with "being found out."

In their import for the sense of shame, sexual interests fall, broadly speaking, into two conventional classes. There are those whose exposure arouses the shame feelings generally among the members of a given social group. This group may be coincident with a whole community, or only with some sect or segment of it. Its taboos and prescriptions are "normal" for the group. From the point of view of another group, or of the bearing of a segment upon a whole, these taboos and prescriptions may be "abnormal." The line between the normal and the abnormal is here obviously arbitrary in its origins and conventional in its survivals. The nearest one can come to analyzing out an intrinsic qualitative difference is the dubious statement that what rouses the sense of shame in everybody is normal; what doesn't is pathological. The latter is an intensi-

fication and extension of the normal, a distortion and an elaboration. It means fear and discomfort in the presence of things that do not arouse them in others. It gets established regularly in people one or all of whose sexual interests are repressed, who are unable to respond simply and directly to the stimulations of sexuality, so that it overflows to non- and anti-sexual things, and the sexual interests are gratified through those.

This is why the enforcement of sexual taboos is so often a preoccupation of the sexually repressed. Hunting and hounding and persecuting manifestations of sexuality are classic devices for relaxing a little the painful repressions and giving an indirect liberty to what cannot be directly enlarged. The activity of censoring not only permits but moralizes and glorifies the preoccupation with sex. This pathological phenomenon is a much more frequent constituent of the syndrome of censorship than most people imagine. It calls for study and understanding, not combat.

Authorities, especially legal ones, speak of a "public sense of shame." We have no equivalent in English for the French "pudeur publique," and the feeling it stands for, here in America, figures less as public than as

religious. Apart from precedent in the law, the thing is extremely difficult to apprehend, because, as we have seen, there does not exist a single, common or general sense of shame. This sentiment begins, like all our customs, only as a feeling in individuals. It is spread from one to another by contagion and infection. These processes make it epidemic, the state of each reënforcing the state of all. The mood of one individual, which would otherwise lapse, is kept alive by action of the mood of the others. Even so, the sentiment would in a short time spend itself, did not justification and backing accrue from the traditional and customary establishments of the community, from its ways of controlling individual conduct and defining common ideals.

The first effect of contagion or infection is a mob such as keeps recurring in the southern sections of the United States. This mob is a *censor morum* which engages in whipping, lynching, burning and otherwise so treating the naked flesh of men and women in the name of the holy spirit as to defend the virtue of the southern white female and to vindicate southern morality.

If the assemblage persists after the generating occasion has died out, the mob may become a society, with

a president, a secretary, a membership fee, and all the other instruments of organization. Often, as in the North, the process begins at the other end. An organization is initiated by persons like Anthony Comstock or Canon Chase, working on the fears, the projections and repressions of the chieftains of the established order. Thus the Watch and Ward Society of Boston was the reaction of a group in a Yankee minority anxious and restive in the presence of the folkways of a crescent Irish and immigrant body becoming troublesome by its numbers and power. The Irish, led by their powerful clergy vowed to celibacy, have since responded with a censorship which makes that of the Watch and Ward Society seem liberal and picayune, and their Boston ridiculous. Both these fearful and watchful and competitive (of each other) censoring powers depend, like the New York Society for the Repression of Vice, for public sanction of their legalized mobbery upon reserves of the sense of shame, rousable by contagion. They are the ready engines to which anybody whose sense of shame has been wounded takes recourse for revenge and gratifications. Their officers hunt down what their disturbed correspondents smell out, and the chase makes a savory public clamor. Whether born out of the mass through

mobbery, or into the mass through a neurotic self-seeking individual, such a censorious power will formulate its purposes as a body of universal principles and will seek provision to nourish them through itself.

That is, it will have made of itself a vested interest.

It is now a body corporate, an institution which will labor to maintain itself long after the conditions it arose to correct have perished. That is, its only ground for continuing to exist is that it does already exist. And this, in nature, is not a sufficient ground. Hence, to stay alive, the organization is compelled to keep also alive that on and by which it lives. It must refine its sensibilities so that it can see and taste and smell vice where no one else can. It must keep ever present in the public eye the menace to the sense of shame. It must sharpen its organs and extend its field. It must keep in constant play the fear of the violation even of taboos that have ceased to be taboos. It must procure violations where there are none. It must make of itself an *agent provocateur* of the sense of shame. Only so can a censoring organization keep itself going, can it struggle, with any hope of success, for survival in the community of which it is so signal an enrichment.

The rule holds regardless of whether the censors

are commissions like the motion picture commissions of various states or merely policemen or postal clerks or private volunteer agents like the guilds fathered by Comstock and Chase, or churchly militiamen of morality like the Methodist Board of Temperance and Morals, the Christian Science Committee on Publications, or the various guardians, lay and clerical, of the impeccability of Roman Catholic reputations.

5

To such organizations the motion picture is a manna from heaven. Of all the products of the more or less creative imagination which come under the hopeful eye of the censor, the motion picture alone is the one which is censored in advance of publication, here and there and everywhere in the country, not consistently, but well. It must be so. For the various state regulations requiring that motion pictures shall receive the Imprimatur of a duly authorized license are clearly a violation of the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States. But the Supreme Court of these United States, already in the far more liberal days of the year of our anticensorious Lord, 1915, devised a dodge to nullify this defect. The regulations requiring

censorship in advance, declared this august tribunal of last retort, are perfectly constitutional. Motion pictures do not come under the first amendment to the Constitution. That applies to instruments which communicate ideas. Motion pictures do not communicate ideas. They are not an art but an industry and to be regulated like one. What they provide may be inspected in advance equally with the pigs and the pies of the Food Trust, which come under the Pure Food and Drug Act.

And significantly, the magnates of the motion picture, those who invest large fortunes in it, are quite content that it shall be treated as an industry. So to treat it gives greater security to an investment intrinsically far too speculative; it mollifies a little the danger to capital; it promotes the possibility of profits; it enables the magnates to breathe somewhat more freely. Even at that, the uncertainties of their investments are so great that they live ever more in fear than in hope. Nothing, nothing, they insist hence, shall be said or done in the motion picture which shall offend anybody whomsoever. Its stars must live for the eyes of their customers lives of impeccable virtue; on the screen, their speech must be pure from all blame; their deeds must at least end in the vindication of traditional virtue and the

damnation of traditional vice. One need only recall the fate of Fatty Arbuckle, a passable enough screen actor, an incident of whose private life, by coming into the public eye, banished him from the "lot." When Mary Pickford, having been ballyhooed into the status of "America's sweetheart," went to Reno, box-office receipts fell off. And how a quietus was put on that bit of news! The profitable lady, the proclaimed sweetheart of every adolescent in the United States regardless of age, must never be a figure in a divorce or anything different from the convention of innocent, trusting maidenhood, the female Galahad, naïve in virtue and strong in ignorance. Being a capital investment, she must never be anything on her own account before the dividend-providing public. That vacuous depersonalized incarnation of abstracted feminine sweetness which she is on the screen, she must be observed to be off it. Her private life, therefore, if she has one, becomes a secret to be guarded; every item of it a thing pre-censored and premolded for publication according to the presumed convention of the public *mores;* and its actuality a tidbit to be whispered and lied about with prurient smirk and lascivious snicker. And so for all screen actors'

lives.... The implications for public honesty and decency are obvious.

In a different field —

Does any one recall the howl of hurt protest from the Jews over the successfully silly movie of the life of Jesus, called the King of Kings? The picture sets forth the bewhiskered if false dogma that it was the Jews who brought about the crucifixion of the Son of God without whose same shameful death Christian salvation could not be. The Irish made even a noisier clamor over a film portraying Irish national realities. Both clamors were successful.

On the other hand —

Can any one name a motion picture which displays honestly and candidly the interest and point of view of organized labor? The number of pictures is considerable in which the story turns on the relations of workers and bosses. But there is not one in which the character and attitude and views of labor are not distorted to its disadvantage. Indeed, I have seen no American picture that treats of unpopular and uninfluential minorities without prejudice or of popular and influential ones without favor; which sets forth facts and does not make propaganda.

How different, in spite of the press's constitutional venality, this spirit is from that of the public press. The newspapers recount divorce and murder trials in the fullest detail. They purvey vivid descriptions of crimes of force and fraud. They bring to children pictures in the shape of comic strips, like Mutt and Jeff, The Captain and the Kids, Barney Google and others of the species, which are the acme of vulgarity and bad workmanship. And a paper which did not set out one or all of these soulful delectables to the spirit of man would fail in the race for circulation. How long, on the other hand, would a motion picture that did the same things with the same sentiment and lubricity and the same candor and matter-of-factness, survive?

Why the fear of the motion picture among public censors and private congregations of the Index?

First, apparently, because of the range of the motion picture. No newspaper has the same possible circulation. The most tabloided reaches hardly more than hundreds of thousands of people. "Successful" motion pictures reach millions, and all are designed to. In the industry what motion picture is regarded as a success unless it has been viewed by a million persons?

Second, apparently, because of the fact that the

motion picture is a simulation of reality while the newspaper is after all couched merely in printed words and unreal drawings and still photographs. The movies show the very persons; show their actions, their emotions, their expressions, in the life, clearly, poignantly. Hence, they are infectious, they call out imitations as the newspapers do not.

For these ostensible reasons censoring the motion picture is a modern form of sport for certain classes of the community. The impact of their Freudian mechanisms upon the fear of loss and the greed of gain which animate the magnates of the industry renders its standards amenable to the solicitation and propaganda of any censorious group. The aim to be attained becomes, not to make excellent pictures, but to avoid violating or even challenging traditional taboos.

The whole situation is concentrated and symbolized by the list of forbidden themes issued to the members of the organization over which that eminent American moralist, Mr. Will Hays, presides. The following, it is ordered, shall not appear in motion pictures:

"Pointed profanity, by either title or lip, this includes the words God, Lord, Jesus, Christ (unless they be used reverently in connection with proper religious

ceremonies), Hell, damn, Gawd, and every other profane and vulgar expression, however it may be spelled;

"Any licentious or suggestive nudity — in fact or in silhouette; and any lecherous or licentious notice thereof by other characters in the picture;

"The illegal traffic in drugs;

"Any reference of sex perversion;

"White slavery;

"Miscegenation (sex relationships between white and black races);

"Sex hygiene and venereal diseases;

"Scenes of actual childbirth — in fact or in silhouette;

"Children's sex organs;

"Ridicule of the clergy;

"Willful offense to any nation, race or creed."

This is followed by a list of twenty-six things which must be handled with the greatest care. I don't know the origin of this collection of do-nots, but the bet is safe that investigation would discover behind each item either some organized censoring body or some vested interest armed with a threat against the income or capital of the motion picture industry.

The irony of the endeavor of the industry's masters

not to offend anybody lies in the fact that it is in no way the same as making sure to please everybody. From the point of view of the magnate, what is sure to please everybody would make the ideal motion picture. And this is, like other ideals, as impossible of realization as the endeavor to offend nobody. Do what they will, the magnates of the motion picture cannot keep their fabrications free from the interferences of the censor. . . .

For, at bottom, these interferences are not healthy policing but the activities of sick minds. The fears and anxieties and wishes which lead to them, own, as I have already observed, no foundation in the social facts, and no justification from the social record. Investigation discovers no ground for the belief that any one of the arts and sciences has in and by itself any important influence at all on conduct. That a boy, having seen such and such a movie, runs away to crack safes or fight Indians is news; that millions of other boys, having seen the same movie, do not, is not news. There is excitement and gratification in the report that this or that episode portrayed in a movie has influenced somebody to violate taboos or has itself violated one; there is

nothing of similar value to be had from the millions remaining uninfluenced.

The fact is that crowded slums, machine labor, subway transportation, barren lives, starved emotions, and unreasoning minds are far more dangerous to morals, property and life than any art, any science or any gospel — certainly than any motion picture. The danger, in truth, lies not in the suggestibility of the public but in the fears of the censors and the greed of the investors. The intensity of a censorship measures, not the actual influence of its victims, but the anxieties of the censors.

Did they but know it, much which they declare obnoxious to public morals and wounding of the sense of shame is their safeguard and insurance. To no small degree the arts of the heart and the mind take their place with tobacco, chewing gum and liquor as sedatives and releasers. They are substitutes for more elaborate and more serious overt actions, not inciters to them. Providing vicarious but specific gratifications for more general hungers, they release tensions and restore balance to otherwise upset lives. The freer these arts are, the greater the stability of society. Their repression is as a rule a sign of a deep-lying instability awaken-

ing fear in the repressers. They are the first to be repressed because they are at the very top of life, the first to register the secret disturbance underneath, its safety-valve and exhaust. Censorship, like prohibition, is self-defeating because it is a sitting on the safety-valve. The social disturbance, instead of being freely and easily discharged through the arts, accumulates within, and ends by blowing up the whole establishment. The history of crime in the United States since the adoption of the Volstead Act bears testimony.

If the magnates of the motion picture are able to think in longer periods than are required for a cash business, they may well ruminate these observations. As their highly moral arbiter, the Postmaster General of the Harding Administration, so correctly observed, the whole structure of the motion picture industry rests upon the public. The industry thrives upon the public pleasure. But the public pleasure can hardly be nourished on prohibitions dictated by special interest. To please the public it is far more competent to discern its living unrests, to find out its effective drives and hungers and imaginings, those which the regular course of the daily grind cannot gratify or assuage, and to discover the means by which the motion picture can

healthily and happily enchannel these. But a program of this kind means the use of a positive and constructive intelligence; it means a professional attitude toward the industry; it means, in fact, treating the industry as primarily an art and not as primarily a fountain of dividends; it means the use of scientific analysis and artistic creation; it means a battle for independence from the rule of fear and greed. The responsibility is not on the public.

The responsibility is on the financial masters of the motion picture. The public does not know what will satisfy it. The public simply feels hunger and unrest. Any one of thousands of possible pictures, well-made or shoddy, may serve to allay that hunger, to still that unrest. The public has no initial power of choice. If its gratifications are provided through a poor picture, it will accept that for want of a better one. If a better one is provided, it will flock to that. The decision is not in the box office at all. The decision is in the makers of motion pictures.

III. *What Is an Elephant?*

A FABLE FOR CRITICS

POLITICS, I have learned from literature, is not the one only manufacturer of strange bedfellows. He was hardly a politician who called for a lion to lie with a lamb, and ladies lay down with lap dogs long before Barnum. Not the strangest of bedfellowships, either, is that of the players of the game called Criticism with certain blind men, and of the game itself with an elephant, more or less white. This beast is celebrated in fable because of a high disputation the blind men had once held on the theme, "What is an Elephant?" each deriving his arguments from an accidental pawing of a pachyderman part. The disputation has gone down in legend as a light o' logic, but there has been, as usual, no profit from example, even from so significant an example as this. Experience, it would seem, also when it brings disillusion, never quite kills hope, and with

regard to the arts and the sciences and the labors of critics one is always both disillusioned and hopeful.

What criticism is in America, how it stands and what it does are mystifications I have more than once sought enlightenment upon, from the works and wisdoms of the great *arbitres elegantiæ and censores morum* of the land — from Mr. Irving Babbitt, and Mr. H. L. Mencken, from Mr. Stuart Sherman and Mr. J. E. Spingarn, from Mr. Van Wyck Brooks and Mr. T. S. Eliot. When I saw that their several wisdoms and those of two or three others had been collected in a book,[1] and that the book was offered as a revelation of the function and status of criticism in the United States, I said to myself: "Aha! At last! Here at last I shall rest from my searchings, here at last is resolution for the perplexities of my mind. The most sage and authoritative of American critics are justifying the ways of their species to the man on the street. At last I shall know why one is to be believed and another to be beblahed.

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[1] Criticism in America: Its Function and Status. Essays by J. E. Spingarn, G. E. Woodberry, W. C. Brownell, V. W. Brooks, I. Babbitt, H. L. Mencken, T. S. Eliot, S. P. Sherman and E. Boyd, with an Appendix of Passages Illustrating the Growth of an American Tradition of Criticism. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

At last I shall know who shall be my light and my leader through the wilderness of books and things." Alas, once more was a fond hope felled hapless. The most unscrupulous gin salesman has nothing on the critics, talking about criticism, for the persuasiveness and skill with which they cry up their own critical goods and cry down the other fellows'.

"Criticism's creative," apodictates Mr. Spingarn. "It's an art. It's expression. All art is expression. Don't express the Willies. Express yourself about the Willies, and you're a critic."

"I am," Mr. Babbitt thereupon pontificates, "but you're not. Expression my all-standardizing eye! That joke had whiskers before your grandfather's grandfather was born. It was bandied about on the *Mayflower* that was. It's the cat's whiskers on the *Mayflower* that is. Worse than mid-Victorian. Eighteenth Century. Rousseauist! Bah! Criticism is conscience. Criticism is standards. Criticism owns the ethical and generalizing imagination!"

"Bunk!" cuts in Mr. Mencken. "Booboisie ideology! You and your schools and your standards. How do you get that way, you poor boobitt! I hold with Herr Professor Spingarn. I used to think that a critic ought to

know something besides himself. But I've changed my mind. It's my right as a free Marylander. I hold with the eminent apostle of the eminent Croce! In fact, I go farther. A critic doesn't even have to know himself. He should get beyond himelf. He should get wise to being a superman. Criticism is certainly an art and the critic certainly must express himself. And how! What else in the wide world has he to express? What else, except the subway, can he express better?"

"What defilement! how un-American!" laments the lamented Professor Sherman. "The critic must know the difference between good and evil. He must be an ineffable voice of the ineffable national genius. He must share the moral idealism of American society. He must help it make the Ten Commandments do their good work. He must labor with it to render Puritanism beautiful."

"Never!" breaks out Mr. Brooks indignantly. "The good work of the Ten Commandments only works art out of existence. Puritanism has been an ugly escape from the realities of American life, not their substance. You can't make it beautiful. It has rendered literature as 'mere,' as a pork packer renders pork. It has degraded art into an amusement or a soporific. We don't know

what America is, but we do know it isn't Puritanism. America becomes. America is an experiment, the great American experiment. America is an object of faith. The job for criticism is to discover the faith."

"Now I've another idea," Mr. Spingarn rings off, taking the last word. "To express himself the critic has to be a philosopher. He has to be well-informed and he has to have a deep sensibility."

Mr. Woodberry opines that you are not really able to express yourself until you have learned something about the biography of the work of art which moves you to expression. Historical criticism, he says, comes indispensably before æsthetic criticism, or expression, in which you become one with the soul of the artist. Mr. Brownell sets forth that a criticism should convey a correct judgment as well as a portrait of a work of art. Mr. Eliot on the other hand wants the critic to be very intelligent, to refrain from making judgments of worse or better, and simply to inquire and elucidate. Doing this, he thinks, demands both sensibility and intellect. He says that criticism is a development of sensibility, a critic's statement in language of the structure of his perceptions.[1] And yes — Mr. Boyd denounces Mr.

[1] That was five years ago. Since then it has been revealed

Sherman as being a Ku Klux Kritic and wanting American literature to be Nordic, Protestant and blond.

There is also an appendix of "passages illustrating the growth of an American tradition of criticism." All the personages cited in about ten pages—Jefferson, Emerson, Poe, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Lowell, Moffat, Walt Whitman, Bascom, Timrod, Parkman, Burroughs, Henry James, Howells, Henry Adams, Queenslet, P. E. More, T. Roosevelt, J. Huneker, John Macy, Amy Lowell, James B. Cabell — seem to sustain the doctrine of Mr. Spingarn; but from what I know of them I feel sure that Mr. Sherman could have found citations from most if not all which would sustain the doctrine of Mr. Sherman.

That, however, is another story. It is the case in hand which makes me trouble. Would not anybody's head be in a whirl, reading the codices of these nine master-critics (three of them, alas, have long since this was written gone to their reward) who go off like members of Congress before election, contradicting themselves and one another. Each, as you read him, persuades; and, on this thing or that, convinces. But their arguments

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to Mr. Eliot that the grammar of ecclesiasticism is the measure of all things.

spin you round like a teetotum. At first you tell yourself that they can't be all Congressmen or all right. Then you ask yourself, "Why can't they?" Then you recall how insistent each is on his own unique and exclusive rightness and the complete wrongness of the others. And each is a great seer of truth concerning the arts. Most reputable. Most respectable. Most holy. With large, devout, respectable and reputable congregations of communicants that hang upon his words....

2

It's when your headache becomes almost unbearable that you remember the fable of the Blind Men and the Elephant.

The Fable of the Blind Men and the Elephant sets forth, not without solemnity, how a whole, even a whole Elephant, may sometimes be quite other than any of its parts. That this instruction should apply also to criticism and to critics of criticism, need, the world being the un-Fordlike assemblage it is, cause no shock even to the most pious communicant of any critic's confession. On the contrary, it should relieve his mind and unburden his heart.

Criticism is first and last a name for certain ways

of several men and women with the works of other men and women. The makers of the ways and the makers of the works are by no means simple personalities. They start with different and by no means simple ancestries. They are worked upon by variegated bringings-up. They undergo diverse educations and divergent experiences. Their hungers, drives and appetites called though they are by identical names, are no more identical than the personages they are the soul of. None of this is news, but, then, none of it is remembered and used by the critics and the critics of critics. Therefore I do not hesitate to repeat that nature and nurture, sensibility and discipline, origin and environment, crash or flow together to establish for these dignitaries their minds and hearts.

Neither the artist nor the critic is a sudden creation, vocalizing in a void. The critic certainly is not. He has a biography. And his biography is the indemiscible compenetration of what he was born with, what he learned, what grew up in him and what he invented, responding in a thousand conscious and unconscious ways to an environment of men and things, institutions and movements, ideas and passions, all manifold and changing in themselves and changing

and manifold in their influences upon one another. His character as critic consists of these responses. They are not primary, but eventual. They are last terms of the give and take which goes on continuously between him and the total contents of his experience. Among the items of this give and take are works of art. Whenever any person's totality of responses is brought to a focus and drawn into a pattern by a work of art, so that he moves to translate it into words, the potentiality of criticism has come awake in him. When he reflects upon his verbalized responses, when he practices, disciplines, elaborates and refines them, he becomes a critic full-fledged, an amateur of the fine arts. When he communicates his reflections to other people and is paid in money or esteem for doing so, he has made criticism his profession.

Professional or amateur, a critic's deliverances about a work of art or the artist who made it are determined wholly neither by the traits of the work or its maker, nor by the character of the critic. The controlling causes of what a critic says about any subject lie hidden in the pattern of his relationships to the world he lives in and are a response to the position of his subject among the processes of experience which

make up this pattern. In these processes, the lines of force are his ruling passions.

Why, under the circumstances, should criticism ever be anything less than an expression primarily of the fortunes of the critic's ruling passions, conscious and unconscious, as they are prospered or defeated by the contact with his theme? So far as I know, it never is. Criticism reveals how the work of art or its author is influencing the critic's destiny. That is, criticisms are, in the first instance, personal moral judgments, unique verdicts concerning better or worse, private preferences. Because of the nature of language, their verbal form dresses them up in the regalia of universal law. The symbols which project the preference depersonalize it, promulgating it as a generalization, and generalization is the form of public opinion. But it is a personal preference and thus a moral judgment none the less. What else, in the nature of things, could it be?

3

To denounce criticism for moralizing, therefore — to talk about "æsthetic" as against "ethical" judgment — is an absurdity of the classifying habit of mind. In living experience there are no such compartments.

Thought invents them as methodological conveniences. Living means simply to prefer one standard or instrument or purpose to another — Mr. Sherman's to Mr. Mencken's or Mr. Spingarn's to Mr. Babbitt's. But a choice among standards is not a rejection of standards. Rather is it a confirmation of their reality and an acknowledgment and demonstration of their variety and multiplicity. Their confrontation, conflict, dissolution or integration are no less the nature and life of criticism than of any other discipline of the mind or the body.

How entirely and perfectly this is so stands out in the fact that critics of the school of Messrs. Spingarn and Mencken do write to be read, and do speak to be heard. Expression, *an und für sich,* is soliloquy. It intends no communication; it only registers an impact, like the flight of a hat when the wind hits it, or the meow of a cat whose tail has been stepped on. An expression once made is over and done with. Like the smoke of a cigar it was, and is no more. And would not such a fate for their expressions terribly irk the critical expressionists? Without an audience, and a responsive audience, what would the expressions be, more than sound and fury, signifying nothing? But in

fact what are they meant to be? Communicative symbols that carry meanings which their authors intend their audiences to share. However much they may be preferences and expressions, they are communications by so much more. Their function is not served unless they do effectively communicate. The audiences — their powers, interests, needs, wishes, prejudices, fears and hopes — are automatically and ineluctably constituents of the conditions which make the expression what it is. They are the significant environment which the expression is designed to alter into greater harmony with the ruling passion of the expressers. This greater harmony is the latter's hope and purpose. It is an end that can be served only in so far as the artist and critic is, in Mr. Babbitt's admirable phrase, disciplined to reality — to the reality, the stubborn and resistant reality, particularly, the far from easily pliable reality, of the ruling passions of the public to whom, willy-nilly, all expressions are expressed.

Now the expressions of the critic must be made under still another limitation, which does not apply to the artist. The artist addresses the audience directly with his own meanings. The character of these is inwardly governed; their qualities are autonomous; they need

not be — though, of course, they usually are — referred to anything else, to be accepted or rejected. As compared with the critic's, the artist's meanings are not interpretations, not mediations. The critic's works can hardly be anything else than interpretations and mediations. His communications are about something not the same as themselves, about something out there which evokes them and which they envisage and appraise to somebody else, out there, to whom he addresses them. If, in fact, the only meaning a critic can convey to that somebody is just the critic himself, then Mr. Somebody has been badly swindled. The critic has won his attention under false pretenses.

For Mr. Somebody does not heed the critic because he is interested in the critic. Mr. Somebody heeds the critic because he is interested in that which the critic is presumed to be talking about. In the turmoil and welter of books and pictures and dramas, stage and screen, whose number, variety and quality have been so overwhelmingly multiplied with the spread of industry through our civilization, Mr. Somebody no longer has the leisure, nor feels the competence, to seek the more excellent for himself. He will not adventure like Childe Roland. No Dark Tower for him. He

looks to guidance. He looks to expert guidance. He asks for light and he asks for leading.

The critic, whatever his class or status, and whatever his conceit may be of his own function — whether priestly-oracular or ciceronic-descriptive or Napoleonic-masterful — serves as the guide, the lighter-up and the leader. His craft is to be the Taster of the Arts to the Public. The practice of this craft may be elaborated with all sorts of flourishes and ornamentation. It may be called "creation" — and why should it not? — "expression" or anything else you like, but guidance is the foundation for whatever else it is made up into. It belongs with the other tasters' crafts, the tea-tasters' and the wine-tasters', who advise the public about tea and wine. By nature an expressive communication, a criticism advises the public about an artist or a work of art. If, while sustaining the presumption that his work is doing this, the critic makes it communicate only himself simulating the artist or the work of art, what shall be said of the critic?

But the practice of the very expressionists who profess that the critic is only a *doppelgänger* for the artist, a public ghost-writer not ashamed to proclaim his simulations, is far more realistic than their profes-

sions. If it were not, all criticism would reduce to either a repetition or a destruction of its subject matter. That it reduces to neither is matter of course. Not, however, if one is an expressionist critic. Imagine him called upon for a criticism of that sacred bovine of modern poetic zoölogy, the Purple Cow. True to his expressionist principles, he would have to repeat himself in the Cow, thus:

I have become a purple cow
I never meant to be one;
Until I found out anyhow,
I had to be to see one.

In this far-off divine event, our critic has entirely nullified himself. He has made himself as one with the cow as any mystic with his God. There is nobody left to mediate between that work of art and his audience. Its members can each on his own account become a purple cow. If his theory is true, the mediator does them no good. The critic *qua* critic is only an unnecessary complication, a social luxury. He renders no service, but he adds to the expense. When he has completed expressing himself, the public still waits to learn about the Purple Cow....

Or suppose that on the other hand the critic, equally true to his expressionist principles, repeats the cow in himself, thus:

I have consumed the purple cow,
Haunch, paunch and jowl I ate her.
I had to, since no other how
Can critic be creator.

In this no less far-off divine event there is nothing left for the critic to mediate to the audience hanging upon his word for illumination and judgment regarding this same Juno. Expressionism thus presents itself in fact as a sort of Irish bull and its horns are the horns of a dilemma for the critic to whom this bull is the Olympian Jove of his worship. Because, if the premises of Expressionism are valid, the critic either identifies himself with his subject matter or his subject matter with himself; criticism either dissipates the critic or annihilates the theme. Fortunately, the dilemma is a logical, not a practical one.

In the actual practice of criticism, expressionist criticism included, the cow does not assimilate the critic nor the critic the cow. Criticism is an activity in a triangle, the work of a third party upon a relation-

ship whose protagonists are the artist and the public. It is a work that serves as often to break as to bind the couple. And not less frequently it wastes itself upon the desert air. Even if the expressionist utterance purposes only to convert the public to expressionism and to stretch all the works of man on a pro-Croceian bed, there is more to the critic's activity than just expression. A function is added, above and beyond expression, and it is precisely in this added function that *criticism* consists.

4

In the light of what in fact happens when criticism takes place, the fundamental dogma of the Moses of the expressionist sect, that all expression is art and that all art is expression, is either an empty paradox reached by dialectic or an altogether obvious, ancient and trivial truism. As the latter, no quarrel is possible with it; as the former it is not worth a quarrel. In either case the recent much ado about it is much ado about nothing. The flux of life and the specifications thereof have long been a cliché of philosophy and a commonplace of science and a vision of the arts. It is now well known that the world we live in is one of time and change and chance where every present event follows another going before

and is in its turn displaced by a third coming after. Here not one stays, not a thing endures. There are beginnings and endings and lapses and stoppings-short and renewals but no event takes place without a push from behind, nothing passes on without pushing before. Our experience flows like the generations; not an item comes to us without antecedents or leaves without consequences. Since, then, all existence is change and succession, what can any one thing be if it be not, on the one hand, an *ex*pression of some other thing, pressing behind; on the other, in its turn the pressure bringing expressions to the fore? What is not, at one and the same time, a cause making its effect, an effect pointing to a cause behind it? In terms of the actualities of the daily life, what is Expressionism but a new exciting name for the ancient and trivial truism that each item of our experience is at once the cause of some effect and the effect of some cause? So, not only art, everything is expression. Everything; including the criticism of Messrs. Sherman, Babbitt, Brooks and Brownell. In this world of chance and change and time, where new things are constantly coming to be out of old things, everything is creative; the criticism

of the moralists no less than the criticism of the expressionists.

But — creation and expression are the merest beginnings of the story. The history and significance of any work of man are eventual, not primary and inborn. They accrue to it after it has been expressed or created, and there is nothing predestined or inevitable in the accretion. Chance and fortune play no mean rôles in it. Its maker's purpose or its critic's good intentions are no more than starting points in its career, whose changes may alter its direction and transform its nature beyond all recognition by the first intention that made it or the first insight that envisaged it. For it happens into a world with which its fitness is not a foregone conclusion, but a hazardous achievement. It becomes one more item in a fluxful crush of competing groups, institutions, and individuals whose alignments, shifting ever into new patterns, make up all the life that society possesses; and among them it must establish its place, and with them struggle to maintain this place. Those which it fits will initiate it into their community; those it clashes against will reject it. Its function and status will arise out of these dual activities of initiation and rejection. Such beauty and ugliness as are attributed to it

will accrue from these relationships; so also such goodness or truth or their opposites.

And these relationships, it cannot be too often repeated, are not intrinsic but adventitious. They are uses, modifications of fortune and status. Since intrinsically nothing has a use, everything simply becomes. Uses are eventual, special and propitious relationships between different things, and what we know as beauty is the relation which supervenes upon their integration into a system of mutually sustaining interests. Criticism is what occurs at the critical point in an event's history where initiation, rejection or integration takes place.

The standards and methods of the critics are as wide and varied as the groups whose organs of expression they willy-nilly must be. The cross-fire of their disputation is but one of the battle-noises of the classes and sects into which mankind are patterned. It is the noise which is dialectically projected as an "æsthetic philosophy" or a theory of life. The doctrine "Art for art's sake" starts like the doctrines "Art for God's sake" or "Art for morality's sake." It is born as the passionate preference of some private person whose communications win the assent and allegiance of a small aggregation of other private persons. The private preference is

thus raised to an article of companionate faith. It works upon the individuals who believe in it as an engine of socialization. It turns them from an assemblage of free and independent personalities into a religious sect, with works and ways of its own. These in their turn react on the article of faith. They transform it into a sacred revelation, a saving gospel for all mankind, to be fought for and bled for and died for like any gospel, and with far greater right. Only a vicious abstractionism, an æsthetic and moral imperialism will demand to reduce the multitude and variety of sects and salvations to one only method and one only form. Only a reforming and monopolistic zeal, a critical dogmatism as arbitrary and puritanical on its own behalf as Roman Catholicism or traditional Puritanism has been on its, will require to legislate what interests shall rule a critic, what vision he shall follow or what method he shall apply. Mr. Van Wyck Brooks is of the Genro of the Younger Generation; but he is a critic with as reformist an ardor as Mr. Stuart Sherman. Mr. Joel Spingarn is the chief, and happily, perhaps, the only major, prophet in America of the revamped and italianate neo-Hegelisms of that brave spirit and turgid dialectician, Benedetto Croce; but is he therefore less intolerant and eager a mission-

ary than that anti-human "humanist" from the academic Main Street, Mr. Irving Babbitt? As for Mr. Mencken; is there anybody but Mr. Sumner who can match his drive and forthrightness as a preacher and reformer? It is in the direction and goal of their reforms that these masters of those who want to know about art are opposed; not in the urge to reform. Scratch a critic, and you find a missionary.

5

Criticism, seen truly and seen whole, appears as a labile and indefinite enterprise engaging all kinds and varieties of men, and developing, under the organizing pressure of the various social forces of which it is an expression and to which it is a response, into a definite institutional organ of industrial culture. The men engaged in it have their loose hierarchies, from the sophomore making his start on a daily paper to the columnist seeing his finish there; and from the columnist to the high churchmen and metaphysicians of the craft, the Menckens, the Babbitts, the Brookses, *et al.* Each bears his part in an enterprise that is not an essence which can be deduced from general principles, but a patterned aggregation of so many similar activities of as many

different individuals; activities going on in a world in which business, science, politics, fashion, disease, war, religion and what not else ineluctably interpenetrate with the arts and letters. They cannot, without artificiality and violence, be separated out in such a way that a residue called art may in fact be left. Unfortunately for those desiring or asserting such a separation, it happens that the arts, and therefore criticism, are significant precisely in the degree in which they are conversant with exactly those to-be-rejected matters. Criticism is like politics and critics are like politicians, with their regularisms, insurgencies, hypocrisies, platforms, sincerities and philosophies; with their practice of claiming exclusive integrity to the pretensions of their own party and compromising as practical men with the integrities of whatever others are powerful enough to force recognition.

There is no longer any mystery about politics, however, and the savor of sacerdotalism remaining to the politician now leaves a bad taste. We automatically discount the claims of parties and partisans to be the sole bearers of political salvation. But for obvious reasons, critics wear a priestly aureole above their jovial brows; criticism is distended with a large sizing of

mystification and hokum in the shape of "æsthetic philosophy" and the like; its position of authority naturally makes it pontifical. The arts and their criticism are all too often suffused therefore with the familiar dim religious light on which authority most thrives. 'Nuff sed....

6

And where, finally, in all this ratiocination, does America come in? America, alas, does not come in, except accidentally, and by way of illustration. It is true that Mr. Van Wyck Brooks and Mr. Stuart Sherman and Mr. Ernest Boyd devote essays to this broad acre and that the other members of the galaxy take pains to declare its deficiencies in the line of criticism. But that is done *en passant* to the more serious domain of first principles and general rules. There is no real specification of the status and function of criticism in America. The argument is a confrontation of opposed philosophies of art and criticism each of which claims, of course, universal range and validity independent of time, place and circumstance. We are merely permitted to infer the implications for America of these so all-important universals.

This, in my view, is most unfortunate. The events

of criticism are unhappily no more amenable to universals than any other social occurrences. They cannot be deduced from general rules, even though they should take form as general rules themselves. To exhibit the function and status of criticism in the United States would require the exhibition and analysis of the specific sequence of the critical literature of the country from the first. It would study its processes and permutations in the changing complex of the national life of which those are an active and activated part, and of whose tradition they are, with its other dynamic units, co-makers. Perhaps one generalization would emerge from such a study, perhaps many. But only such a study, empirical, particularistic, genetic and inductive, could envisage the status and function of criticism in America as fact. What Mr. Spingarn and his moralizing fellow-reformers set up is legislation in the place of description and prescription in the place of analysis. They do not do what they say they do, but whatever they do, it is their right. By announcing preferences as principles and personal insights as cosmic laws, they pit in the arena of opinion varied and opposed qualities and pay each his way to that consensus whose formulation defines the spirit of their age. In spite of their theories

about criticism, they practice criticism. Though they ignore the living wholeness of the Elephant, they contribute their part to it, be it only the lively tail. And if the idea that the tail wags the rest is what keeps it lively, then more power to the idea.

IV. *The Public School and the Painter*

I AM going to be very platitudinous, but I make no apologies. It is so often difficult to distinguish a platitude from a disagreeable truth or a paradox from a lie, that I take refuge in the hope that what I have here to say is platitudinous because it is true and, perhaps, disagreeable, and not because it is in everybody's mind like the tune of a musical comedy or a slang phrase. Platitudes, I have noticed, are like the Bible and Karl Marx, often quoted and sneered at, but little studied or applied. They are exactly like bread at the table; nothing tastes quite right without it, but we dislike to eat it ungarnished. Now platitudes are the bread of discourse, the staff of its life; and in the discussion of works of art one of the most recurrent of them during the last decade is the observation that criticism, like the arts which are its subject matter, is an expression of the temper of the age which it seeks to guide.

Criticism gives voice to the age's prevailing mood, its institutional organization, its centrally animating ideal. If the casual observer finds that criticism has changed from an art to a profession, if he finds that the critic looks either backward or forward but never around, that he is a propagandist and missionary for novelties or holds up the dead past as a life-light; if he finds that the critic has tended to limit his criticism either to the allusive expression of feelings which works of art evoke in him, or to the learned analysis of the artist's technique and treatment of his theme, he finds these things because the arts have themselves more and more become mere expressions of private feeling or individual skill, because the artist has perforce learned to regard himself as an individual merely, because the arts no longer rise from a common ground of vision or express a common ideal.

And where a poet's or a painter's work is the utterance of a bare, private mood, a symbol in an autobiography, which may or may not have meaning to another man, the only thing that can be common to all men is not *what* is said, but *how* it is said. Manner will be far more important than matter, and the critic who seeks to be truly objective will hardly consider any-

thing else. His critical labor tends to interest what readers he has in manner, and by a natural, inevitable step, to drive the artist into mannerism. So a vicious circle becomes established in which the material significance of the work of art is crowded more and more into the background. Nothing distinguishes contemporary painting, for example, so markedly as its astounding technical skill and intellectual vacuity. There is hardly a senior in an art school who cannot tell Leonardo something about technique. But who to-day could tell Leonardo anything about significance?

The crumbling fresco in the Santa Maria della Grazie will, even when it shall have become a mere memory, outlast a million of the wonderfully drawn landscapes and still-lifes and what-nots. The reason is not far to seek. The great painting of history had been, in the long run, under the necessary dominion of great ideas. Whether the patron of the painter happened to be a despot of the military or of the ecclesiastical order, is no matter. When the king is the state, his operations in war and in peace, his fortunes and decrees, all things pertaining to him, become, willy-nilly, the momentous concern of each of his subjects: one need think only of the Russian peasants and their *Batashka* of hardly more

than a decade ago. They paid his taxes and fought his battles, and built his palaces, roads, temples, and bridges. Willy-nilly they had a share in his magnificence; his glory was their glory and his loss was their loss. To a degree, this is still the case with the people of Japan, of some of the kingdoms of India, and wherever else an absolute sovereign is monarch over a submissive people. The events which the painter records for such a tyrant belong ineluctably to the sole and lonely tradition of joy and power of the whole people; it constitutes their common, corporate history in so far as they are able consciously to have one. It is the heart of their unity as a people. If the painter's themes come not from this but are memorial, then, in a similar fashion, the memory is the memory of the race; the personal triumphs of the ancestors of the despot are incidentally personal; like the despot's own biography, they are corporate, the essence of statehood, and they are nothing without the people whose labor realized them, and whose labor they express and portray. Be the painter servant or slave of the king, his art is always national and free.

This is even more true when the despot belongs, not to the political order, but to the ecclesiastical. For

the themes of religion used to be the most corporate and profoundly significant man ever concerned himself with. They deal with the import of life and the destiny of the race, with its relation to the unseen powers that control its existence, with all the good and evil that are its ultimate portion. These are realized in the myth and ritual of the peoples, the biographies of the saints, gods, heroes, and saviors of their cult; and they are expressive at once of the deepest feelings and aspirations and of the oldest and commonest memories of the whole race. The art which uses these themes is national and free to a supreme degree.

Now the bulk of the history of the great tradition in painting is a narrative having for theme these two orders, the heroic and the hieratic. The technique in the tradition corresponds to its themes. By reason of these it makes for the plainest and most straightforward statement of its subject-matter, for elemental simplicity in design, for elimination of shadow, for strength of outline and flatness of tints; for richness and vividness in coloring. Bar the work of Puvis du Chavannes and his like, it is as different as anything can be from contemporary painting. Because of its subject it has dominated the past. Save for a brief interruption in demo-

cratic Greece, the tradition of its manner and theme, the former exaggerated through the influence of Byzantine mosaic, remained unbroken until Masaccio and Piero della Francesca broke it as far as the manner was concerned, and the Flemings as far as the theme. None the less, what is greatest in Renaissance painting takes its theme from either the heroic or the hieratic field in the great tradition.

This greatness rests upon the *ethos* of the work. Technically ethos is the *style* which expresses the genius and character of the race; pictorially ethos is the *theme,* set either by a people's great, corporate traditions, or by its broadest and most fundamental present interests, or by both. The sculpture and the drama of the Greeks are typical. Their style is the consequence of a practice repeated and developed for generations until it has become, by dint of the repetition, an excellence, a perfection in its kind. Their theme derives from both the heroic and the hieratic legend of the whole Hellenic race and incarnates its characteristic ideals. They embody the spirit of Hellas in a series of human figures whose history constitutes a succession of concrete symbols of the Hellenic individuality and its relationships. Christian painting, from the Byzantines to Raphael, attains

its perfections in style similarly; and how absolutely its theme, having, all in all, no local habitation, was the very spirit and aspiration of Europe, need only be stated. Even when the *genius loci* is commemorated, as, for example, in Giotto's frescoes of the adventures of St. Francis, the life of the *genius* is expressive of the pride and hope of the whole place, and nothing that is of value in it can be merely private.

The change of the spirit of Europe from ecclesiastic to secular, of her social order from the tyrannic to the democratic, was marked by a corresponding change in the arts. They became desocialized, personal, lyric. The painter, the poet, the sculptor turned from public servants into private individuals practicing their arts at their own risk. Their utterance, consequently, ceased to be the voice of a great human group; it became merely their private speech, a series of soliloquies. Their themes, which had been set by the experience and aspirations of the race, gave way to the expression and record of the sensations and emotions of their disparate lives. They began to care less and less for pronouncing great truths, and more and more for voicing trivial feelings. Landscape, in the painting of which private emotion is much more important than theme, became prevailingly

the object of representation, until to-day the art of painting is in danger of being buried under the avalanche of landscape annually let loose.

2

This is an explanation, not a condemnation. The painter is not here to blame. He is only a symbol of the fact that society has become too complex to retain its old spiritual unity, that the complicating forces are still too recent to have generated a new unity; that morally, at least, society is disorganized. Modern life has been to a great extent comminuted and specialized, without a center. The representative building is the factory with its machinery, its isolation of the elements of a process of production to particular specialized groups, its flagrant powdering of a whole reasonable act into a series of detailed and, to the workers, unrelated processes. The representative art is the motion picture with its disintegration of all the movements into a series of isolated and motionless fixtures, machine-made, and machine-controlled in reproduction. Churches and temples and public buildings, once the centers of commonwealth because the centers of common life, daily in use by all the people,

have become specialized, professional, sectarian. They are no longer the shrines of the memory and the ideals of a people; they are the occasional meeting places of particular sects, or the regular work-rooms of the members of a particular profession. What decorations embellish them are not constantly before the eyes of their visitors and are irrelevant to their interests. They are sophisticated and artificial, like Mr. Blashfield's *Spirit of Wisconsin* in the capitol at Madison, or the Harrisburg decorations; or they are literary and archæological like those in the Boston Public Library; all without any root whatever in the emotion and the mind of the people or the ideals of the state; representative only of the cogitations and learning and best intentions of the artist and nothing else whatsoever.

This is nowhere so true as in America. Compared with Europe, society in America is an artifice, not a growth. Here there have been no centuries of a common life, shared by a people with a common ancestry, expressed in the forms and ideals that are inevitable to it, as flower to seed. The English stock, of whose nature our country's early ideals were the expression, is now the small minority. Most Americans are Germans, Slavs, Irishmen, Jews, Italians, Scandinavians, Africans. Their

heredity and racial traditions are inconceivably diverse, and quite different from the English; and their spiritual capacity is determined, first of all, by their heredity and traditions. The word *American,* consequently, designates an external condition, not an inward character, and what, at present, these so various nationalities, often never so conscious of their nationality as here, have in common, by virtue of which they may be called "American" is an acquired surface manner, which any moral crisis sloughs off. The hereditary and traditional determination of spiritual capacity is not, however, absolute. These nationalities are here confronted with each other with a force and thoroughness that operate only on the upper classes in Europe. That is one reason for their intense self-consciousness. But the confrontation requires them also to make concessions to each other, that they may live together; it develops in them a new mode of procedure, fresh habits and customs necessary to the common life. And this compels disintegration; and as disintegration is far more rapid than reconstruction, the condition shows itself chiefly in the variety of police and charity problems, the economic instability, the social unrest, the intellectual insipidity and spiritual confusion.

Whether the reconstruction is likely to come to better things than the old European ones, seems to me doubtful. Under the conditions, the spiritual future of America is best thought of in analogy with Great Britain or Switzerland, each of which is one commonwealth with many nationalities and cultural enclaves. Some lovers of America desire, however, far more. They desire *one* commonwealth with *one* culture, with at least one political ideal, and one literal nationality, born of the many. And for the realization of this hope, the disintegration of the European tradition is a desirable preliminary. Without that the fresh habits and customs of mind and body, which we wish to call "American," could not easily get formed. America is regarded in Mr. Zangwill's untrue phrase, as a "melting pot," whence the stuff that comes out will have a singleness of quality the direct opposite of the heterogeneity that goes in.

That this conception has its nobility and even as a "lost cause" is well worth striving for, no one will gainsay. But the new stuff's formation is necessarily slow. Although, on this side, its instruments are supposed to be diverse and multifold, foreigners who know Europe, men like Mr. Alfred Zimmern or Mr. H. G.

Wells, are impressed chiefly with the operations of the public schools.

To my mind the public school looks very much, not merely like the chief instrument in Americanization, it looks like the only instrument. It is primarily and exclusively in the public schools that the great masses of our population discover America as an ideal and a standard, and not as the congeries it in fact is of social, economic and intellectual events in various stages of conflict and integration. It is the public school that is the only public building which the whole of the population will have visited frequently, and have visited at the most impressionable age. It is in the public school that the great national holidays are formally celebrated, like religious rites, and the national heroes are made specific to the young imagination. Church and synagogue, capitol and museum, these are the meeting houses for occasion, and the interests they serve are diverse, private, and special, not corporate and national. In the public school — that is, if the school does not become perverted and specialized, as it is in danger of becoming, through responsiveness to special pleas of special interests, which is turning it into a vicious feeder of the industrial machine under the guise of "vocational

training" — the concern is about interests which cannot help being solidary and common. What the temple and the palace were to the ancients, what the church was to the medieval, that the public school — in a much less effective way, no doubt — is to the modern in America, — a shrine wherein are celebrated and perpetuated the fundamental traditions and the ideals of the Nation, celebrated, of course, but humbly and imperfectly according to the capacity of the miseducated schoolma'am rendered by the confusions of professors of pedagogy ever more unfit for teaching, but celebrated and perpetuated none the less.

Now the temple and the church differ from the public school fundamentally in this respect — the people who realized their common life in those were born thereto, and the ideals and the traditions were fulfillments of the life. The people of our public schools have no longer a common origin and a common heritage. The former they never can have; the public school tries to create for them the latter. Americanism is a thing that they must acquire before they can live it; it is not a thing they are born into, and that is what makes the problem of their education for citizenship so difficult. That they are the common people, the very

common people, of Europe, need not be dwelt on, although it is a fact with salvation in it. It is a fact on which all intelligent effort to make them realize America must base itself, the artist's contribution to this end no less than any other.

3

WHAT can the artist contribute? The history of institutions makes the answer clear enough. Consider just the one example of the Catholic Church. Its hold on the masses has been fixed more firmly than most of us suspect by its magnificent imagery, its constant repetition, in vivid, personal, clear, and simple pictures, of the narrative which embodies and illustrates its dogma, the dogma which the children learn at the most impressionable age through the catechism, realize through the images, and go, in consequence, no matter how intellectually alienated they may become afterwards, through their whole subsequent life, modified in will and colored in emotion thereby. It is a similar treatment by the painter of the ideal principles of Americanism, as these are expressed in the country's history, which history prescribes. Such a treatment would have a double effect, for it would not only realize America for

Americans, but would culminate in a real American art, with national traits in technique and theme. In art as in all things, there is no royal road to national distinctiveness and distinction of nationality. *Ethos,* with its quality of style and subject-matter, is attained only by dint of long practice, repeated for generations, in the expression of the central national theme, in the manner inevitable to the condition of the painter and the character of the theme. So it always has been, and so it must, in the nature of things, always be.

The point of all this talk is that I saw what I thought were the beginnings of such a process, making for an American school and art of painting in — Chicago. I cull from the Circular of Instruction for 1913-14, published by the Art Institute of Chicago, the following announcement:

> The field of Mural Painting is rapidly widening, and it may be said to be the hope of painting in America. The practice of it is difficult, partly because of such physical obstacles as the requisite space and the expense of models, canvas, and paint. In the Art Institute practical problems of mural decoration are undertaken each year. These decorations are usually for the wall space of public schools. For this work all advanced students are eligible. Compositions and color schemes are presented in competition, and the successful competitors carry out the work full size. They study the rooms to be decorated, and are in-

structed in the preparation of canvas, the selections of paints, and the various technical requirements of mural painting. The expense of models, paints, and materials is borne by the patrons or by the Art Institute, and in most cases cash prizes are offered. Such decorations will be found in the Hermann Raster, Hermann Felsenthal, Smythe Linne, Tilton, and John Schools in Chicago, the Dewey and Washington Schools at Evanston . . .

The "patrons" in almost all cases are the school children and their friends. I am told that they secure the cost of their decorations, frequently by the long accumulation of pennies, sometimes by getting up dances and entertainments, and so on, through all the devices for raising money which public school groups are aware of. I hear on all sides of the intense interest in the work from the time of its inception to its completion, and I have observed the pride of the children in pointing the murals out. The whole thing has reminded me, on more than one occasion as I went from school to school, of the enthusiasm recorded in the church and temple decoration of older times. This enthusiasm, as Mr. Thomas Woods Stevens, to whose inspiration the work owes its inception, realizes, gets attached to the story which the mural tells and — Americanizes.

In a building where there are instructed daily [says *The School Arts Magazine*] some sixteen hundred children, only twenty-four of whom were born of American parents, these

pictures have a function beyond the purely decorative. In such a room we have represented "Columbus Sailing," "The Landing at Jamestown," "La Salle on the March," "Washington at Cambridge," "Clark on His Way to Vincennes," and "Lincoln." These hundreds of children must grope their way into American traditions, for the old-world traditions of their fathers and mothers do not hold out against attrition of the American city. The children find in the paintings some hint of this America in the making.

But what themes to waste an enthusiasm upon! Study the decorations, and you cannot help being impressed by the irrelevance and triviality of the themes that hint "America in the making" and by the frivolity and obscurity of the symbols that express them. You get the feeling of a great chance missed. That the qualities of the ancient murals are not, and under the conditions hardly can be, attained, even as beginners attain, goes without saying. The spaces which the decorations fill were not made to be so filled, and the technical problems which they offered have, in fact, been well solved, often with unusual ingenuity and skill. In theme, however, they all lack the centrality, the simplicity, the *ethos,* which is necessary to a genuine symbol of a fundamental ideal. Instead of telling *one* story, of incarnating therein the spirit of America as a dramatic narrative, from the signing of the Declaration

of Independence to the free naturalization of the last citizen-immigrant; instead of telling over and over again, in terms of historic narrative, the meaning of "liberty, democracy, and union," these fundamentals in the idea of American nationality, the decorations dribble away into statements of trivial and incidental events, of contemporary and industrial interests, of insignificant local history. Or else they symbolize abstract pedagogical subjects, like mathematics and geography. All in all, they are just as lost in the sand and shingle of private preference and immediate detail as the rest of contemporary painting. There is individualism, but no individuality; no promise, so far as I can see, of an inevitable quality which can be called only "American," no promise of the expression of the Nation's common and constant mood and her central vision — if she has such.

For this the students and painters are not, of course, altogether or often to blame. Themes are set for them by their patrons, and they do their best. But it is not in this way that the national qualities and the great traditions of painting were realized in Europe. It is not in this way that the peoples have been kept alive to the fundamentals of the Athenian city, of the Roman

Empire, of the Europe of Christianity. How do such subjects as "The Landing at Jamestown," "Washington at Alexandria," "Evolution of the Alphabet," "Builders," "Cement Age," "Arithmetic," "Geography," compare in significance and depth with the innumerably repeated Madonnas, Crucifixions, Last Suppers, and all the other portrayed events in the life of Christ? How do they compare with the memorial sculptures of Greece, with the Emperor-gods of Rome?

Judged in the light of tradition, they cannot be called anything other than trivial, private, and unsocial. They may be American art, but they are hardly promising beginnings for the "Art of America." The schoolhouse offers to the painter a unique set of conditions, conditions practically unparalleled in modern history, yet continuous with the conditions of the great tradition. The schoolhouse public offers him an audience in mind virgin and active, having, in the larger cities, to acquire the traditions of America with the language of America. But neither the controllers of destiny who govern the schools nor those painters and their pupils who have begun to see the important function their art can play in that Americanization — which natives need even more than immigrants and the descendants of the *Mayflower*

Fathers at least as much as the offspring of steerage mothers — seem to be quite awake to their opportunities. They are opportunities for painter and community such as European civilization has not known since the seventeenth century. It would be a pity if they were foregone. And the pity is.

V. *The Arts Under Dictatorship*

IT is a convention of the modern point of view that the artist must be free. There is that in his nature which no tie may bind, no obligation compel; for once bound or directed or compelled, his genius as artist is frustrate, and that precious gift of his to the rest of us, the work of his head and heart and hands, is killed before it is born, or is stillborn. Freedom is fertility in art; restraint is contraception and barren of fruit: this is our view, and has been, these hundred years.

The facts of human nature of which it is an underscoring and an elaboration were recognized these two and more millennia, but never before have they been so highly prized. The expression "artistic temperament" names these facts. Plato was as fully aware of them as the psychoanalysts, and as peremptory as Nordau in classifying them among the madnesses. In his ideal

Republic he could make no place for poets; their gifts were to be recognized, but they were to be sent on to the next state. We ourselves are inclined, in our talk at least, to take them in and to cherish them precisely because they are not as other men. We expect them to dress queerly and to behave more so. We forgive them — especially when they are dead — for being cruel lovers, faithless husbands, wicked fathers, false friends. We expect them — when we have nothing ourselves to do with them — to be irresponsible about public duties and private property. They would not meet the current conception of "artist" as life and letters have built it up unless they were somehow different from the rest of us in all these things; free where we are bound, rebellious where we are submissive, irresponsible where we must answer to the last letter of the law.

That this concept of the "artist" does not square wholly with the story of artists' lives robs it of neither glamour nor authority. And there is enough in the story to make the concept plausible and give it body. Apart from the fascination which it exercises, it gets its force from that anciently recognized fact of human nature to which its defenders always point — the fact that in the history of the arts "creative work" seems with great

regularity to be associated with lawless behavior. And "creative work," when compared with other kinds of work, is held by the artist as well as the public to be in theory at least so important, so valuable, as to entitle its creator to a privileged status in society. It is an end which might justify any means. The mere claim that somebody is doing "creative work" like writing a poem instead of building a bookshelf, or painting a picture instead of whitewashing a woodshed, establishes a sort of prerogative for the claimant; just to hear the claim gives us the feeling that its maker has a title to certain privileges that we would — almost indignantly — withhold from carpenters or housepainters or even policemen. As Mr. Bertrand Russell, discussing science and art under socialism, says, among other many luminous and misleading things: "Art springs from a wild and anarchic side of human nature." Not only must the artist be free to make works of art, the public requires freedom really to enjoy them. . . . "None of these good things are to be expected from the mere removal of poverty: they all require also a diffused sense of freedom, and the absence of that feeling of oppression by a vast machine which now weighs down the individual spirit. I do not think State Socialism can give this sense

of freedom. . . ." And Mr. Max Eastman, writing about the state of life and labor in present-day Russia, agrees with Mr. Russell. He also thinks that art is born in wildness and anarchy, and he has not a high opinion of the contemporary arts as practiced in Russia.

The implication is that free art and strong government cannot live together. Strong government necessarily is repression; free art necessarily is expression. Expression and repression are eternal opposites and cannot both at the same time qualify the same man or the same society. When the form which strong government takes is that of a dictatorship, the oppression is all the surer. Whatever their claims, dictatorship and the arts are alien to each other, and always must be.

Our own times have made so much of these views, hoary though they are, that they have acquired a peculiarly modern feel. They have come into the foreground of conventional criticism, however, as the projection of a mood, not as the analysis of a record. They are symptoms of rebellion, not findings of fact. Neither the history of art nor the biography of artists bears them out. If poets seem madder than priests and politicians it is because they have been studied more attentively; if painters seem wilder than production-

managers, if opera-singers seem more anarchic than efficiency-experts, it is because they awaken and hold our interest more readily and over longer times. We now know that Gladstone was at least as wild as Giotto; that Carnegie was not less anarchic than Carpaccio; that Darwin had his moments equally with Dante. Indeed, there is a ferment in bread from which cake is kept. Business, science, church and state are no less insane than the arts; the arts are no less sane than the other institutions of our civilization. There is no vocation which does not require a wild and anarchic side; there are few in which it is so generally harmless and happy as in art; there is none in which it is so candid and uncostly. If we prize the arts so highly and admit the artist to a privileged status with so much less reserve, this is why.

Earlier times had another view. When the fine arts had not yet divided off from the total complex of the arts, and sculptors belonged to stonemasons' guilds and poets held cards in apothecaries' trades-unions and painters were apprentices to goldsmiths, artists were workers among workers and nobody thought that they were madder than their fellows. They enjoyed no greater privileges and were charged with no fewer

duties. Craftsmen all, they flourished under dictatorships, and established the great tradition of their crafts in the service of dictators.

Dictators weren't called dictators in those days. They were called King, Pope, Emperor, Tyrant, Duke, Prince or what not. However they were called, they exercised a power at least the peer of Mussolini's in Italy or Stalin's in Russia, and very probably more than the peer. And much of what is acknowledged by the very moderns who exalt wildness and anarchy as the springs of art, to be of the height of artistic achievement, is work done at the behest and in the service of the dictatorial power and of the dictatorial ideal. These might be of the Church or the State — mostly and longest, of the Church. The Church has her gospel to guard and to teach; the lives of her saints to teach and to cherish. These are tales that are told, and to the great illiterate populations of whose souls she is the custodian, the painters were the tellers. They told the "stories" by rule, detailed, elaborate, unbreakable. As the canon adopted by the second Council of Nice declares: "The composition of the figures is not the invention of the painters, but the law and tradition of the Catholic Church. . . . As St. Basil says, this law, this

tradition, is in the ordination and disposition of the Fathers, not for the painter to decide. For the painter, there is his art."

This rule held till late in the Renaissance. Note what a distinction it establishes, a distinction we moderns can no longer appreciate; the distinction between *what* the painter paints and *how* the painter paints. Not the painter but his employer must answer for *what* he paints. The Fathers of the Church choose the "story" and ordain "the composition of the figures." The painter ordains only "his art," and his art is a technology, a method or system of so handling his materials that his pictures tell perfectly the story which the Church desires to tell. This story is a corporate matter, a matter of supreme moment to those who believed in the Christian scheme of salvation; and at the time and for long after, there wasn't anybody in Europe, except the futile minority of Jews, who did not believe in the Christian scheme of salvation. The scheme was one and single and same wherever it was taught. It was fixed, it was infallible. To offer to change it was suicide in this life, hell in the next. An artist who should dare to tamper with it would in fact be more worthy of punishment than a heresiarch. He had his art. And his art

was to make the stories in the Epic of our Salvation as vivid and clear and beautiful as lay in his power. His aim could be only excellence in his art, not originality in his theme.

2

Now if you take the great art of the Christian world as a whole, or if you take the work of any single master of it, Michelangelo say, or Raphael or Leonardo, you will find it dominated by the common Christian theme. The thing they say is the same thing: it has not sprung from the personal experience of the painter; it does not utter his private mind and peculiar emotion; it contains nothing wild or anarchic. The thing painters say is a public thing: it is the common deposit of faith whereby the whole community of Europe expects to be saved. It is the expression and communication of this faith. And the artists differed from each other and were appraised according to the skill with which they said and told what everybody believed about salvation. Craftsmanship, mastery of medium and material, adequacy of symbolism, not originality of idea, were the measures they were weighed by. Not *what* but *how* they painted was all their art.

And this *how* was also rooted in an ancient tradi-

tion, far older than that of the Church. While the latter was fixed, the former was fluid. Not having an immutable dogma to preserve, it could keep up, develop and enrich an ancient tradition of craftsmanship. The art of Michelangelo and Leonardo was in the direct line of descent from the arts practiced, not only by the monks of Byzantium, but by the free citizens of Periclean Athens and the skilled slaves of Augustan Rome. It had added to the tradition by experiment and invention, and it transmitted what it added by means of a system of apprenticeship which enabled the pupil to become master of the whole wisdom of the past. He not only used his tools and materials; he made them; he learned their chemistry and experimented with their properties. Because he became master of the past, he could be innovator and creator for the future. For progress is possible only where tradition is continuous; those alone can be original who are masters of what has been originated already; those alone can discover novelties who know well that which is not new; those only can advance an art or a science who stand at the point of its greatest present height. These views are commonplaces in the sciences, but they have been rejected in the arts. The painters of our times use their

earths and menstrua but no longer make or understand them. Ignorance of the past is held to be a *sine qua non* of originality in the present. Difference is preferred to excellence. Emphasis has fallen almost exclusively on *what* the painter says rather than on *how* he says it. The result is — quick decay such as has befallen the work of Mr. Singer Sargent.

Occasionally exceptions to the modern rule appear, but they do not win general regard. There is, for example, the Russian, Nicholas Lochoff. A painter of such distinction in his youth that the authorities of his own country had bought for the national gallery in St. Petersburg, as it was then called, many of his canvases, he early became enamored of the excellences of the great painters of the Renaissance. Numbers of their works, he found, were being destroyed by the attrition of the years and the chemistry of weather, and the time was not far when some of them would be lost forever from the treasure-house of mankind. He set himself the task so mastering the methods and media that went to their production as to repeat the fading original, and by repeating to save. Repeat, not copy. Of copies there are enough; but copies merely reproduce outer contours, not inward character. The latter is a

quality not merely of the arrangement of shapes in space, but of the chemistry of the media which the painter uses, the construction of his tools, the manner in which he handles them. To the study of these Lochoff devoted himself. He read all the books. He analyzed the stuff of the pictures. He reconstructed tools. He prepared and ground pigments. He practiced brush strokes. He has become thus the master painter, the first craftsman of our time. So, I am told, Bernard Berenson regards him also. He has produced repetitions of the crumbling, fading works of Botticelli, of Piero di Cosimo, of Fra Angelico, of Mantegna and Carpaccio and Simone Martini and Rembrandt, often more poignantly beautiful than the compositions they repeat. He is saving for the world beauty that would otherwise perish. Working in Florence, poor, alone, unknown save to a few connoisseurs, such as the great Denman Ross, he has given up the prospect of personal reputation to conserve impersonal beauty. As we moderns regard painting, there isn't a single original idea in Lochoff. He only repeats the dead ideas of men long dead. But he is a master painter and therefore he is a great creative artist. He is master of his tools and his medium. He makes them do what he chooses, and be-

cause he is thus a master he can choose any style and any theme in the world, or invent one of his own. That he does not, but devotes himself to the repetition of great works threatened by time's chemistry, is an aspect of a profound and mystic piety, often to be noticed in Russians. Theirs is still the medieval spirit. They acquiesce in ideas, whether Christian or Communist; they master craftsmanship. They are workmen first and thought-mongers last. That is, they are, on the whole, quite unmodern.

This is why, perhaps, in so many departments of the arts, the Russians of the last century, children as they were of a dictatorship, had come very close to greatness. For greatness, whether in painting or in music or in poetry or in architecture, is a reflection of a public interest, not the projection of a private power. It consists of uttering the inward feeling and outer achievement — or failure — of a time or a civilization in moving and unmistakable symbols, symbols that reveal its own meaning to a people's heart; symbols that by expressing, clarify its purposes and define its ideal.

For example, the differences between Greek forms and Gothic are corporate differences. They reveal a

civilization even more than they express this or that individual. The poetry of the Elizabethans can never utter the spirit of the Victorians: Ben Jonson belongs with Shakespeare, not with George Meredith; Kipling belongs with Swinburne, not with John Donne. Only by violence could the work of Mr. E. E. Cummings be made to dwell in the same spiritual atmosphere with the work of Mr. H. W. Longfellow, or sculptures of Brancusi made natural companions of the figures of Proudhon. Each time, each place, each civilization, has its characteristic tempo, its natural rhythms and symbols, its definitive ideals. The compenetration of these makes up its style, and that artist, whatever his art, seems to be judged greatest who most clearly and beautifully incarnates this style in his own work. He is Euripides, or Dante, or Michelangelo, or Shakespeare, or Goethe, or Tennyson, or Anatole France. Their works possess ethos; they embody and utter, they illumine and communicate the central vision, the inmost aspiration of a people and an age. We call them *classics,* and this is why.

3

Until well into the eighteenth century, the central vision in any given land had been religious or dynastic

or both. Art had accepted its themes from plans of salvation or dreams of empire. It had celebrated the acts of God or the achievements of Kings, endowing both with an earthly immortality more certain than the heavenly. Princes of the Church or the State fed the artist, protected and rewarded him. He lived, and sometimes thrived, as a member of their households, or at least under their patronage. With them as patrons, he had both station and status.

But by the middle of the eighteenth century a very important change began to manifest itself in the artist's position in society. He ceased to produce works under the patronage of the great nobles and began to produce them in the employ of the petty tradesmen. The writer wrote for no prince, the painter painted for no pope. Both offered their produce in the open market; the writer to the booksellers and printers of Grub Street, the painter to possible customers visiting a fair. Selling books and pictures became a business. A class of middlemen, called publishers, dealers and managers made their appearance; and it was directly on them, rather than on the "ultimate consumer" that the artist had to depend for his living. To-day this is more than ever the case: the economic position of practitioners of any

of the arts is that of a journeyman worker in the early days of the industrial revolution. Their skill is of no avail without the capital to print their books or show their pictures or give their acting or singing a hearing: and as the owner of the capital pays the piper, he calls the tune. Artists must compete with one another for contracts and shows. Each must cry his own wares at the top of his voice. The modern babel in theme and confusion in craftsmanship owe to this fact no small part of their existence and growth. The idea that art, more than any other human activity, requires what is wild and anarchic in our natures has the same paternity. The idea expresses the status of the artist in the industrial economy; it does not describe the nature of art.

In two modern states, now, there is an endeavor and a promise to alter this status, to bring the artist back from producing for a market, to uttering and communicating a social ideal. One of these states is Russia. The other is Italy. Each pretends that its political order is the embodiment of an infallible doctrine, as certainly a "deposit of faith" as what is usually called religion ever consisted of. In each there prevails a strict censorship not only over news of the day, political and economic opinion and philosophic ideas, but also over

the arts and sciences. The censorship is explicit and lawful in Russia, capricious and undefined in Italy, but seems not less thoroughgoing in the one country than in the other. In each, it imposes on the arts a single theme, a single system of ideas and ideals; in each it establishes by its veto a limited system of symbols that must utter the idea, a "composition of figures" which is not in the invention of the artist but in the "ordination and disposition of the church."

Under such circumstances, one would expect great things, especially in Italy, whose tradition of painting and sculpture is at the foundation of these arts in all Europe. What I saw and heard and read there left me with the feeling that where art and thought are concerned Fascist Italy is not alive but drugged or dead. Amid the superlative inheritances from the past, I could find among all the pictures that I saw and music that I heard, no present breath stirring. The æsthetic currency of the Paris of 1900 is the currency of the Rome of 1927. Lochoff, working humbly at his repetitions in the Uffizi, is the most moving painter in Italy. The Italians echo the graphic fashions of Paris as seasonally as they reproduce Parisian clothes. I could not discern even the shadow of a shadow of a coming

Fascist ethos. Yet the journals are shrill in their devotion to what they call Fascist art. One declares that a Fascist art must be; another begs you to develop a Fascist art. However, what such an art is to consist of, how it is to differ from the art of Renaissance Naples or Milan or Rome or Florence; what it is to say, and how, that the Risorgimento has not said, you are not advised. Only, a Fascist art must be. Mussolini's brief manifesto on the subject, contributed to *L'Arte Fascista,* is characteristic. "Let us not," he declared, "waste the patrimony that has come down to us from the past, and let us further and create a new patrimony which shall be the peer of that of the past. Let us create a new art, an art of our own type, a Fascist art." I have found it a rule in Italy that you could make anything Fascist, art included, by just putting the word Fascist in front of it when you are talking about it. That word "Fascist" exercises a transforming magic.

But, except for the word, nothing happens. Education has been reformed, but is practiced as before the reforms, so that under Fascist administration, the ecclesiastical interest is better served than ever in the Italian schools and the arts and sciences are doing business only as usual. The same seemed to hold in all walks of life,

save politics and business. Those and not the expansion of life are the ruling passions of Fascismo. In the world of art, consequently, nothing is happening: only the Futurists, whipping a dead horse and calling him Pegasus.

A dead horse! Marinetti, the chief hierophant of Futurism, was one of the most vociferous orators of Fascismo. Mussolini had been his intimate friend, and is said to have learned from him to like the last cry in pictures. Marinetti has published a considerable book on Futurism and Fascism, and he continues to pretend, in spite of Fascism's having moved far away from Futurism, to the extreme right, that the two are still stepping together, hayfoot, strawfoot, side by side. I heard him one evening in Rome, at a soirée of the International Art Society. He sponsored a couple of young men, architectural students, who evidently didn't like their professors at school and who demanded a revision of standards in behalf of a Fascist architecture. As an example of what such an architecture might be, one put on the screen an elevation of a gargantuan structure patterned after an airplane. Marinetti finished the evening by reciting his "Bombardment of Naples." This is a poem of "free words," which is supposed

to make you hear the bombardment. You do — but you cannot distinguish it from bursts of flatulence.

The piece embodies the entire story of Italian Futurism — *vox et præterea nihil,* a war cry shouted into a vacuum. Marinetti claimed, and claimed with justice, that he and Mussolini invented the first Fascist ideology together; and he claimed, and claimed, I suspect, to drown his own fears, that Fascismo and Futurismo are still one. For, as a matter of fact, the two cannot live together in the same world. Futurism, so far as it stands for any ideals at all, stands for speed, for violent action, for dithyrambic utterance to hypnotize mobs with, for extreme individualism in ethics, anarchism in government, atheism in religion. It is against bureaucracy whether political or clerical. It is against organization in any form. It is against tradition.

Fascismo is for all the things that Futurism opposes. It has endeavored after a reconciliation with the church and at least formally attained it. It is seeking to bind Italians into a "corporative state." It is all bureaucracy. It is all for tradition in education, in the arts and in the sciences. Indeed its one positive and undeniable achievement in this field is the expansion of

the program of restoration and recovery of the monuments of classical antiquity. The work there is competent and extensive and entirely to its credit. The rest is in the laps of the gods. To date, the laps of the gods are clean. In another decade we may be able to guess if or that "a Fascist art must be."

4

Russia, after Italy, makes an extraordinary impression. I say nothing of the climate, which it is extremely difficult to discount, nor of the sharp contrast between the variegated snug hill towns of the peninsula and the endless windswept monotone of the Russian plains. I say nothing of the exciting contrast of the peoples. I confine myself only to the one point that moves to sameness in the two countries: that both are governed by dictatorships organized as comminuted bureaucracies, operating from above downward, that both governments are revolutionary and have recently imposed their rule by force.

Coming into Russia after Italy, an American individualist who believes that too much government is far more dangerous to men than too little, I expected that, bad in this respect as Italy was, Russia would be

worse. And from the point of view of great non-political corporations, like churches, Russia is. Although Fascismo is the religion of the Italian state and everybody is there compelled to make his political confession to the Fascisti, other cults, especially that of Roman Catholicism, are too powerful to be fought and too proud to compromise. Multiple allegiance, and thus a certain freedom of mind, is possible and can be maintained.

In Russia the only privileged religion is the religion of the state. This is the deposit of faith attributed to Karl Marx and called Communism. It has no peers in power or station. It is taught as before the revolution the Christianism of Greek Orthodoxy used to be taught, and it bears about the same relation to the ways of life. In matters of art and education, however, it is regulative. It ordains a regimen for the intellect and a pattern for the emotions. The stage, the atelier and publishing house are aspects of the activity of the state and come under the department of Education. This department is charged with the creation and enrichment of a communist culture. The notion is that culture is intrinsically communist or capitalist; that it is so by nature and

not by employment. It is a false notion, as false as a notion of Democratic or Republican apples and onions or Single Tax or Socialist bonnets and babies:

Every little boy or gal
Born into this world alive
Is born a little radical
Or else a little conservative.

The fact is, all such classifications are secondary and eventual, the results of later association or use. By nature, babies are born, apples grow, bonnets are made. So are steam-engines and pictures and books. Whether they shall be called republican or democrat or capitalist or communist, doesn't depend on what they are but on how they are used, and by whom. As Lenin once sardonically remarked: he was quite ready to exchange communist wheat for capitalist locomotives. The wheat was communist only because it was in communist possession; the locomotives were capitalist because capitalists owned them. Once exchanged, communist wheat becomes capitalist wheat; capitalist locomotives become communist locomotives. It is their status and employment, not their natures, that the exchange has altered. And so with all things, including

art and culture, and religion. For is not the Russian orthodox church now in communist service?

In this respect, the practice of the Russians is wiser than their theory. For example, stories, plays, operas, written in Tzarist times for Tzarist audiences, are being published and produced as then but stressed and pointed for the new dispensation. One night in Moscow I was taken to see a much lauded rendering of "Boris Godounoff." It was sung in the conventional way. There wasn't any change in the score or the book; the artists seemed no better than such as I had heard in this opera before. Alone the stage pictures and costuming were different. The poor were made to look so very poor and the rich so too, too, rich. And perhaps there was an accent on peasant humility against boyar arrogance. The opera, which had intrinsically nothing to do with the matter, was being used to drive home the communist dogma about the rich of capitalist states getting ever richer and the poor getting ever poorer.

The social process of which this episode presents an example is continuous, universal and enduring. By it pagan gods get transformed into Christian saints. The kiss-worn toe of the bronze St. Peter in the church of his name in Rome was once the sound member of

Jupiter in a temple of his name somewhere else. The figure which the artist models takes various local habitations and new names, new characters and new duties, indifferently, and serves them all impartially. The Russian organization, being new, doctrinaire and experimental, simply has speeded up the process and rendered it self-conscious and discernible.

But it has gone farther. It has promoted and keeps stimulating a tremendous interest in the arts in its public schools, its trades-unions and its art academies. It has established the graphic arts, from the kindergarten to the college, as an important integer in the reformed school curriculum — a reform which, to have carried through, alone vindicates the revolution. The Russian theater is well known in America but not its base in the theatrical work, from stage carpentry to play-writing and acting, done by all grades and levels of the school and industrial population, and by all nationalities. National self-determination is taken with Laputan seriousness in the Soviet republic; ethnic groups that have no alphabet for their vernacular are provided with one; those that have are required to use it and to develop their speech in administrative and cultural activities. The cost is almost as great as the

inconvenience, but the thing is being done. Everywhere you encounter signs of a great liberation of energy, that overflows or is directed into the arts. The works of the past are rendered easy of access in museums, schools and elsewhere; performances, dramatic or musical, are made extremely cheap. The populace is encouraged and incited to go, to look, to study, to do. You cannot visit a single museum anywhere in Russia without stumbling among large companies of soldiers and peasants and workers, adults and school children, personally conducted by competent guides who more frequently than not turn out to be distinguished and impoverished connoisseurs of the Tzarist times. The works of the past are used to point the Marxist moral of our day; the works of the present have for their themes some visible embodiment of the Marxist faith.

Concerning the quantity of such works there can be only wonder and gratulation. Their quality is another story. One can simply observe that social life, no more than life in nature, is created by single exemplars. You cannot have a raindrop without a shower, nor an individual without a species, nor an excellence without countless equal claimants against which it has won in its struggle to survive. In the arts as in nature,

quantity is an insurance of quality, a promise that it shall emerge. There can be a best only where there are many less than best, and the Russian makes the promise of such a best where the Italian does not.

Like the Italian, the Russian government is bringing together, is restoring, is rendering accessible to the eye and the mind of the expert, great numbers of ancient monuments, forgotten works of all classes, buried in churches and manors and so lost to the delight and illumination of mankind. In the places where they are to be seen you can hear the groups of personally conducted natives being instructed in their history as statements of an idea and as achievements of a craft. Often the proper communist lesson is drawn, sometimes not. Drawn or not, the communist believers are meantime being familiarized with what the past has created. They are being initiated into knowledge of what is excellent in examples of the great tradition, and such knowledge is, let it be remembered, indispensable to a future excellence. The arts no more than the artist can leap from childhood to maturity, from five years to thirty and five, eluding the intervening years. The arts have a history not to be eluded or ignored if they are to have a future as well. This the Russians recog-

nize. Their communist, like their former Christian faith, implies and judges and teaches pre-communist history; it also imposes upon the endeavor of all the arts a unity of attitude, a homogeneity of theme. Pictures to be seen at shows, plays produced in Peasants' Houses and Trades-Unions' Halls, the work of the school children, all are stating one aspect or another of the Marxist dogma, all are using fairly standardized symbols, all are communicating a definite faith, a single hatred, a single hope. The artist in communist Russia may not know it, but he is like the artist of catholic Europe. He is not free to choose his ideas or to compose his figures. These he must accept from the moral atmosphere around him, from the deliverances of the doctrines of his church. The restraint is also a liberation. Having no need to think up *what* to communicate, he is able to think of *how,* to give play to his instinct of workmanship, to consider his craft and its ways. I do not know Russian and could not judge of the poetry, but the craftsmanship of the quantities of pictures I found to be on a generally high level. It moves toward excellence rather than difference as an end. There is much hope in it, but only doubtful life. For the life of an art depends on the living of its

artists, and this on their market. In Russia the state is the only market, and the state, even if rich — and it is miserably land-poor — cannot employ or otherwise provide a living for the great numbers of artists Russia has *in posse*. . . .

5

Here, then, are two modern dictatorships, old states with new governments restoring ancient conditions of administration and control of all departments of civil life, the arts among them. In one of these dictatorships the arts are less alive than ever. In the other they have never been so alive before. While the historic record points to some kind of social control which will weight survival among the arts in favor of excellence rather than difference, the contrasting effects of these two contemporary controls would indicate that there exists no necessary connection between a form of government and the vitality of an art.

On the face of it, the difference in effect between Communism and Fascism is a difference in intent, in goal and objective. Ostensibly, Communism is a leveler. It holds that all men are equal, that the differences between them are external and secondary; that they can

and must be destroyed if justice is to prevail and the equality to be real and manifest. In practice this dogma has the opposite effect. The revolution has functioned not as a leveler but as a liberator. It has imparted to the mass of the people a dignity and worth they never owned before. It has lifted mere people to the status of personalities, each significant in himself. The individual is far freer in his person and his thoughts than ever before in his country's history. His opportunities are wider, more numerous, more varied; his life is richer by a dozen cultural dimensions added to it. His energies overflow. He has learned discontent and ambition. He wants more and works harder. And his team spirit, his patriotism, is spontaneously enhanced.

In Italy, precisely the opposite is the case. The Fascist faith starts with the dogma that all men are profoundly unequal; that the differences between them are internal and primary; that they can and must be preserved and intensified if justice is to prevail and the inequality be operative and manifest. To establish this dogma in fact, Mussolini told me, is the aim and end of Fascism, the rationale of the corporative state, in which every talent is to have its due opportunity, every natural difference to find its social place. But the effect

of Fascism has been precisely the opposite. It has not liberated the energies of the Italian people, it has harnessed them up. It has not set free talent and put it to work; it has repressed talent. Under its dispensation the real inequalities of men are neither operative nor manifest. Throughout Italy, I sensed a mood all strain and tension, a posture of fear prompted by feelings of insecurity. I sensed it in all classes of the population. From Russians I got the opposite feeling. With the feeling go the works. Wherever the energies of men are sufficiently stimulated and enlarged, some will overflow into the arts. Whenever the ideas and moods which the arts communicate are sufficiently unified, sufficiently homogeneous, a type will be generated, excellence will emerge, there will be a great art. The *form* of a government can neither hinder nor accelerate this event. The *will* of a government can do either, or can cut it off. Not dictatorship, not democracy, but the efficacious intent of dictatorship or democracy is what determines the event. Communism and Fascism tell the tale.

VI. *Apparition Out of Academe*

I AM, I think, a cultural patriot, if not 100%, yet with an almost usurious interest. Anyhow, the prospect of any new book about art and letters in the United States excites me as the prospect of an inside tip does a lamb in Wall Street. It was with high hope that I took up a book its author, Professor Norman Foerster, calls "American Criticism." And how thoroughly was I deflated when I put it down! Solid and finished — like a coffin perhaps — the book was. But this is the thought I had when I came to the end: "Some ghosts are never laid. Having lost the body of life in the world where spirit makes a difference, they take up their habitations in the academic shades and from that limbo of dead things unforgotten they sometimes venture out to haunt the ways and works of men in flesh." Such a ghost, I felt, rides this book, which its author describes as a "critical analysis of the

literary creeds that have been most impressively set forth in this country," even though he calls it "American Criticism." One begins by wondering why the book is miscalled. Surely the professorial progenitor, whose business it is to know these things, could not be less than thoroughly aware that criticism is a practice of mediation, carried on by presumably competent persons, between works of art and the public to which they are offered — the critic is the middleman of the fine arts — and that a study of criticism in America would be a study of the origins, growth, activities, and consequences of such mediation here and hereabouts.

Nor could an expert in the field be less than thoroughly aware that analysis of the literary creeds of Poe, Emerson, Lowell, and Whitman is not such a study, not a study of criticism at all. We do not know these four worthies as critics, we know them as poets and thinkers. Tradition reckons them as creators, not mediators; with Shelley and Browning and Swinburne and Shaw, not with Arnold and Ruskin. Their literary creeds are reflections of their own practice, but by no means define the changes and chances of criticism in the United States. Mr. Foerster's exposition of them is full, detailed, and clear and static: he reveals that

abundant familiarity with his worthies which years of mediation between them and college classes inevitably bring, and his deliverances are spirited and well-mannered. But that is all. The familiarity strikes me as being familiarity without insight, like the familiarity of an old skilled cook with the cuts of a beef and no sense of its living form, its real experience; no sensitive empathy of the vital center, no grasp of an organic vision uttering a living soul embattled for its life in a world of change and strife and struggle.

The cause, I think, is the ghost that rides Mr. Foerster's book. This apparition entrances those it besets. It compels the writers it rides to blur and to smudge the qualities of men in order to point a moral without adorning a tale. It lays them under the compulsion to forego understanding for the sake of pronouncing judgment, as in a court of law. Guilty; they say, not guilty; in the light of a commandment delivered from beyond, after the manner of Hamlet's father or some other hortatory incubus. The ghost that so rides academicians of whom Mr. Foerster is one is a holy ghost, and his book is, like theirs, in effect a preaching of it. Consequently its exposition is with exposure all mixed up; it sets out to analyze creeds, but

actually condemns heresies. This trait, of course, is not its author's fault, nor is it a fault at all. I record it because it makes difficulties for me: I feel the text constantly pointing two ways, and one is dark and eerie.

2

Now as a rule, ghosts do not disturb me. In fact, I have a natural as well as a professional curiosity about them. When I know who they are and what they are about, then, even if they are invisible, I am at ease in their company and soon come to friendly terms with them. When their invisibility is made provocative by anonymity and I feel them working, the relation is not so pacific. One gets annoyed as by anonymous advice over a telephone. If only Mr. Foerster had made annunciation of his holy ghost in the first chapter instead of the last!

For in the last chapter one learns why his book had to be what it is. It comes out that he is an adherent to a critical sect who own a creed they call Humanism. The members of this sect seem to be practically without exception college professors, and their chief hierophants are Irving Babbitt, a professor at Harvard, and Paul Elmer More, a professor at Princeton. As Mr. Foerster

reports it, the Humanism of these gentlemen is made to contrast sharply with romanticism (which, he says, dominated Poe and Emerson and Lowell and Whitman), and realism and "naturism" (which, he says, dominate the twentieth century). Where romanticism is all desire without discipline, and the other two all multiplicity and appearance and degradation without unity or standards, Humanism is "a standard of values" to which man is free to conform or not; a system of ideals such as Plato set forth, to be apprehended not after the manner of science, but imaginatively and intuitively. The system envisages a single universal, complete, perfect Human whence flows whatever excellence our poor, chaotic and variegated aggregations of humanity may happen to be imbued with.

In the light of such a Humanism, can anything be modern and not be also deficient? For is not the past the very stuff of what we are to-day, and are not the romanticists nevertheless in blind revolt against it? Do not realists and "naturists" want to cut us off from the past — that is, from its remoter, more important parts? What are they but isolationists demanding a unique, self-grown national genius unrooted in past experience? Do they not foolishly think that a national

soul can be asserted, whereas it must assert itself? "While it would be interesting for us to be Americans," Mr. Foerster declares, "it is far more important for us to be human, and . . . while we cannot know how to become American, we can know reasonably well how to become human." To him, and his sect, any independence of the past whatsoever is a delusion. They charge that the moderns, when they do look back, look back only the three hundred years of the life and labor of science, whereas they ought to be looking back to Plato.

Why to Plato and not to Democritus, why to Greece and not to Egypt or Assyria, these companions of the faith do not say. The choice is arbitrary, as I see it, and lies altogether in the accident that Messrs. Babbitt and More, having been educated as they have, happen to find in Plato's superstitious and by no means unambiguous formulæ the most convenient symbols for their particular state of out-of-sorts with the workaday world. That Plato or the Greeks would acknowledge for their own what these "humanists" attribute to them is a speculation far from me. For, as I have shown in the paper on Humanism and the Industrial Age, in my "Culture and Democracy in the United States," the

Greeks were not humanists and Plato was not a Platonist. Had he been a Platonist he could not have been a humanist, and indeed, so far as his own desires and aspirations were concerned, he was an anti-humanist, who turned his back on the life of man in this world and sought to escape into a visionary Other which he described as easy to live happy in, contemplating the gods.

Messrs. Babbitt and More simply confuse with the things they want and the "standards" they prefer for themselves, the *uses* to which the humanists of the Renaissance put Greek and Latin literature; these uses being called Humanism because they opposed the secular "humanities" of antiquity to the divinity which preoccupied the Middle Ages. The humanists used the classics to expand life and to make it more abundant. They were instruments of secularization. When the world had become sufficiently secularized, these "humanities" ceased to be engines of life and became preoccupations of professors, doctrines and disciplines of the schools merely. Life and letters moved away to other fields of growth. But in the shades of academe this humanism has survived as a ghost of that lapsed existence and is adored as the unknown god whose

shrine a wicked generation abandons. In a world of Babbitts, it is not unnatural that the puritan duplicity of the George F.'s should bring forth to balance it the corrective purist duplexity of an Irving, and that Irving should glorify his superstition as classicism in the life. This classicism seems to me the most romantic gesture of all — the pre-Raphaelite medievalism, the chinoiserie, the various nostalgias for the remote in space and time, for mystic wholeness and mystic oneness — which so variously utter the romantic mood.

Evocation of a romantic conscience despairing of reality, the Humanism of the academic cult haunts the schools, a pale ineffectual ghost. Life and letters go on, in the United States as elsewhere, untouched by it. Ever and anon it makes a manifestation, but so weakly, the arts don't know it has been there.

For the moment you try to embody it in life or letters it dissolves to nothing. Take only one instance, Mr. Foerster's admonition to the critics he does not agree with to give up trying to be the Americans they can't be in order to become the humans they can.

What is it to be "human" like that? If it is not to be a living man, with the unique juices of individuality and locale in his veins, it is nothing. Before asking

others to become this abstraction, our *akademiker* should at least demonstrate an actual example of it, a model they could reproduce and realize in their own lives. That, however, is the one thing he cannot do. Were he Plato and Mephisto in one he could not do it. His best, as Plato himself points out in his profoundest and least figurative dialogue,[1] would be only another specific and local individual. His worst would be one of the many verbalizations of an emotion — an emotion working unaware, at that — in which his sect abound.

The fact is, American is what we on the spot can be without learning, just by living and working in the American scene. Humans, merely humans, we can be not only by ceasing to be the individualities we are, but by ceasing to be at all. The *cultus* calling itself Humanism which substitutes an abstract Humanity for living men, an eternal perfection for the changeful process of civilization, is not only a ghost but ghastly. It is the last faint gasp of secularized Calvinism, the frayed latter end of the genteel tradition. In the words of the well-known Happy Warrior, on whose breastplate the more

[1] The Parmenides. The study of this dialogue is recommended to all *soi-disant* humanists who charge Plato with the dogmas of their cult.

primitive and theological owners of this tradition split the solid South, it is a lot of boloney. So far as American criticism is concerned, this boloney seems until now to have been among, but not of it. It has left not even an odor, whether of sanctity or of the charnel house.

VII. *Style and Meaning*

MY friend is an editor, but he has high ideals. One day we lunched together, and our talk turned upon the matter of literary style. The occasion was a paper of mine in which I had used some hard technical words that he wanted me to change. He was manifestly diffident about asking the change, but his literary conscience was troubled, and his duty to his readers was plain. Against both his inclination and his duty I had no wish to offer any resistance; he was too whole-souled about the matter, and even momentary wholeness of soul is a rare and beautiful thing. The one phrase which I could not change was, however, just the one he had found most trying. I had written of the span of our human life as a process of "maturation and senescence." "What does that mean," he said with gentle emphasis, "other than growing up and growing old?" He said other things, too, but I have

forgotten what they were; I was too full of my retort to hear anything more.

What, in his literary conscience, troubled my friend about that phrase was the feeling that it added nothing and obscured much in the meaning of the words. On behalf of his readers he felt that it augmented the strain of reading and taxed the mind unnecessarily. I think he added also that it was ponderous and harsh. Wasteful, inelegant, dissonant, these are charges sufficient to condemn any phrase to death.

All of them, I think, are conventional charges, and false charges, drawn without thinking because of a false tradition concerning the nature of style and the relation of style to meaning: the tradition of the rhetorician who fixes the outlines of the dead externals of diction and sets them up as measures for the living word; the tradition of a class of men of letters to whom the best way of writing is the way easiest to read, without regard to accuracy in stating intent, or adequacy in giving it form. Accuracy rests upon vocabulary; form is the consequence of logical order unfolding in time. These elements stand out in style, but they are not the fundamentals. The fundamental in every style is the rhythmic idiosyncrasy of its movement. Without

that we could not possibly perceive the intent of thought, or get to the total significance of expression. It is to speech exactly what it is to music. It generates and deposits words; *which* words is determined by the thought's own pulse and cadences, that orders them as a magnetic flow orders iron filings or a stream carries leaves. In poetry this is obvious, or should be, particularly in the *vers libre*. In prose it is not so obvious, but it is none the less a fact. Eloquence need have no content; it works by infection, not signification; anybody who has heard a performance by the late Mr. William Jennings Bryan knows that. The written word is even more dependent upon the transmission of the inward pulse for its effect, for it is not carried by a voice. Rhythm is characteristic, individual, the essence of personality in style.

The other element of style is what the rhetoricians call diction. This is the more fixable quality, easier of analysis, easier to talk about. Rhetoric books and editors' minds and writers' dispositions are full of rules about how and what and when and where to choose among words. But I have not noticed that these rules ever helped an aspiring writer, although I have many friends who declare that they have learned by means of them

to distinguish between good and bad writing. The rules are, in fact, retrospective; if they help you at all, which is doubtful, they help you to identify excellence after it has been created, but as for creating it — as well accomplish fatherhood by studying anatomy. Editors, critics, reviewers and other middlemen between writers and publics may be well enough aware of this truth. But their own share of the sloth innate to mankind automatically disregards it. They prefer the familiar to the new, the vague to the specific, the similar to the same. Because it is easier, they would rather identify than distinguish. A false clearness attained by short and simple common words is more welcome to them than a true one achieved with correct long and strange ones. Their vocation reënforces their inertia. They are afraid of anything that by challenging a reader's effort may raise his resistance. For them the foremost rule is to choose that word which will tax the mind of the reader least. So, since it requires less effort to understand "growing up" than "maturation," and "growing old" than "senescence," choose "growing up" and "growing old" and throw "maturation" and "senescence" to the dogs, and call this consequence of laziness and fear good writing.

2

WHICH goes to show that literary middlemen are quite as wrong about words as rhetoricians, and as innocent of their relation to the spirit as the priests who preach the Word. I should like to change the adage that a man is known by the company he keeps into the adage that a man is known by the vocabulary he keeps. A man can be separated from his company, even if it be that Freudful haunt, his mother. His vocabulary, however, is his very soul; when that changes, his nature alters; the words he spontaneously and habitually uses are the lasting core of his thoughts, the furniture of his mind, the framework and order of the world he lives in. But neither rhetoricians nor literary middlemen are more than dimly aware of this. They observe that words have certain vague, elusive overtones of meaning. They call these "connotation," mutter a few generalizations about its rôle in the making of a style, and pass to another thing which they call "denotation." By "denotation" they intend to designate the precise meaning of a word. This, they imagine, being explicit, specific, and tangible, can be measured and defined; and since the aim of prose writing must be the lucid transmission of meaning, the word that

sets a given thing easily before the mind, and no more, is the word to use. The denotation of "growing up" is the same as that of "maturation," of "growing old" the same as of "senescence." Why, then, burden the reader's understanding with such heavy weights as "maturation" and "senescence"?

Because, dear editor, there exists no word with a meaning explicit, specific, and tangible. Meanings are as subtle fluids. Words are like barren stream-beds into and out of which the meanings are continuously flowing, stirring them to fruitfulness and life. All words, consequently, are ambiguous. And for this reason a word's denotation is the most unimportant and trivial property it possesses, except for logicians. The import of things lies not in what they are. The import of things lies in what relations they bear to other things. Their dangers and uses, their excellences and defects, their total worth derive from these. A thing is a center through which unnumbered lines of connection pass, as an infinity of lines pass through an identical point in space. The words which designate any given thing do more than merely place and denote and identify it. Each sets in relief one strand of its relationships against all the others, and it is by these relations that the work-

ing meaning of the word is defined, not by the thing. Assume, for example, that the denotations of "senescence" and "growing old" are identical, that both designate a seasonal ebbing and depletion of existence, a slowing down and disintegration of the machinery of human life. But "growing old" relates this process to the visible social semblance of a man, to a wrinkling of skin, a whitening and falling out of hair, a stooping of shoulders, a loss of memory and reasonableness, while "senescence" links it with the system of inward physiological changes, deterioration of cell-structure, deposit of mineral salts, and so on. Water and hydroxide, salt and sodium chloride, any group of synonyms you choose, denote precisely the same things, but their *meaning* is the systems of relationships they set these things in. To Spinoza and his followers God and Nature have an identical denotation. But Spinoza himself distinguishes their meanings: God linking all reality with the tradition of conscious supernatural power, Nature with the mathematical order and material mechanisms of the physical world. Identical though these words are in denotation, God relates what it denotes to the aspirations of the heart while Nature relates the same thing to the operations of the

intelligence. Words are keys which unlock identical doors on different vistas. Import and importance are due to the vistas alone. Ultimately they define our appreciation of the character and status of those things we mind because we wish, and those we mind because we must. The words that open them to us determine by so doing our theories of life for us. They are the body of our philosophies. People who think of "growing old" as "senescence" and people who think of "senescence" as "growing old" hold, in fact, radically different, if not opposed, *Weltanschauungen*.

3

Nor is this the end. The full, rich meanings which words have at the height of their significational function tend to contract, even as their denotation tends to become irrelevant. The meanings compenetrate upon the point instead of expanding over the view of the point-of-view. They cease to awaken the intelligence to the perception of relationships and serve only to stir the emotions to irrelevant response. Instead of opening the doors of the mind upon visions, they lift the gates of the heart to feeling. Appreciation of them becomes habitual, reflex; their meaning is all in their sound.

They touch off joy, depression, pleasantness, discomfort, instantaneously. There exists a distinct class of words affecting us so, feeling-words, to be distinguished sharply from meaning-words. Any word may enter this class or leave it, according to the place its last meaning has held in the folkways of a society. Usage is the arbiter. The head and front of such words is the blessed word Mesopotamia. Philosophy and religion and history abound in them. Many a sounding philosopher has won fame and thanks from mankind for iteration to the point of idiocy of such words as "reality," "spirit," "ideal," "infinite," "eternal," "immortality," "love," "evolution," "superman," "God," "progress," and so on to no end. Think of that balm of Gilead — "in tune with the infinite." Think of the glow which that masterly phrase "Christian Science" evokes, or of the aura of well-being which is shed by the word "Christian" in any connection. Politics has its shibboleths no less — "100% American," "progressive," "socialism," "radical." It was not for nothing that in "Man and Superman" Shaw made the old gentleman tell John Tanner that he was a "radical" before Tanner was born. There resides in such words, value-words, an emotional significance intrinsic to the words themselves, independent

of all other meaning. They confer godhead. They create devildom. The things to which they are applied are thereby lifted up or cast down; as in the case of the dog with the bad name, the name, not the dog's the thing. Words which have collapsed from stimuli to perception into stimuli to feeling only, which have become mere value-words, approving or condemning regardless, are the greatest of all conservators, the most effective intrenchments against intelligence and progress. Many a sane and just enterprise has been defeated by the epithet "socialistic"; more than one nefarious scheme advanced by "Christian," "American," "service," and such.

Bacon was wrong. Words are only fools' counters. The wise man realizes that the hope of mankind depends upon the success with which society can be taught to give old things new names. When "growing old" will become generally accepted as "senescence" much of its hardship will vanish. For men will have abandoned the illusion of immortality, they will have acknowledged and learned to rejoice in the order of nature and the cycle of birth and growth and death which governs their being, they will have learned to

rob death of its sting and the grave of its victory by going serenely to the end of the passage.

If schooling is habituation in a vocabulary of works and days, education is the continual substitution of one vocabulary for another. The root of style is a theory of life whereby commonplace things are set in a cosmic perspective which is their meaning. And, of all our tools that give perspectives, the most widely used, the most efficacious and enduring, is the living word. Each time and people and person has his own, brought to birth by its characteristic pulse and rhythm, and endowed thereby with its inward beat and outward pattern. For this reason, the style is not alone the man, the style is the age, the society, the civilization. By their styles shall you know them — the Elizabethans from the Georgians, the Victorians from the moderns, the moderns from all. In the measure of their prose and verse, in the vistas of their vocabularies, in the appreciations and condemnations of their value-words, are revealed their secret hearts and public minds, all that they fear and hope for themselves and mankind at work upon an experience they are bringing to order and excellence by binding with words, by giving it, that is, meanings.

If the beliefs of the rhetoricians and the literary middlemen were true, this could not happen. Repetition, not variety, would be the rule. Edwin Robinson would still be writing like Geoffrey Chaucer, and John Dewey would be rehearsing John of Salisbury. Between these poets and philosophers the difference is not in the denotations of their experiences; it is in the designation of their perspectives. Life and letters themselves repudiate the loose and lazy thinking and writing which goes for excellence among those for whom "least troublesome" is synonym for "best."

VIII. *Ineffable Snark*

Come listen, my men, while I tell you again
The five unmistakable marks
By which you may know, wheresoever you go,
The warranted, genuine snarks.

Let us take them in order. The first is the taste.
Which is meager and hollow, but crisp:
Like a coat that is rather too tight in the waist,
With a flavor of Will-o'-the-Wisp.

Its habit of getting up late, you'll agree
That it carries too far when I say
That it frequently breakfasts at five o'clock tea,
And dines on the following day.

The third is its slowness in taking a jest.
Should you happen to venture on one
It will sigh like a thing that is deeply distressed:
And it always looks grave at a pun.

The fourth is its fondness for bathing machines
Which it constantly carries about

And believes that they add to the beauty of scenes—
A sentiment open to doubt.

The fifth is ambition. It next will be right
To describe each particular batch:
Distinguishing those that have feathers and bite,
From those that have whiskers and scratch.

For although common snarks do no manner of harm
Yet I feel it my duty to say
Some are Boojums—

WHEN Dante belonged to the apothecaries' guild and Villon to the goodly fellowship of thieves, their craft was a hidden lore and their trades owned a religious secret and a heavenly inspiration and protector. Carpentry was no less from the gods than prophecy and weaving than poetry: for every craftsman had his company and was the initiated master of a mystery. The time is long past when the carpenter, the weaver, the smith and the barber-surgeon referred their arts to a revelation from on high and practiced them under the inspiration and supervision of the appropriate patron divinities. The mystery has departed from them. The guild has been replaced by the trades-union; the apprentice by the schoolboy. Knowledge of materials and the tradition of workmanship are now imparted in

the open, without initiation and without ritual. Such vestiges of the mysteries of a craft which survive, survive by virtue of a new function. They serve no longer to transmit a technique. They serve only to pay for a companionate conviviality or to insure "union standards and conditions." Alone religion and poetry continue to dwell by usage and consent in the mysterious fane. That religion should do so is to be expected. Mystery is its vocation and it fights a rear-guard action before the light. Churches institutionalize mysteries and churchmen practice them for livelihood. It has ever been so, and so it will remain while religion survives among men.

Mystification in poetry has a less consistent history. To some degree it flows and ebbs like a backwater tide. One day the companions of the craft will be all for scientific matter-of-factness, for positivism, and verbalizing efficiency; another day they will be all for inspiration and metaphysics. But on the whole, inspiration and metaphysics have ruled the field. In spite of the long tradition of empirical criticism which Aristotle's "Poetics" began, the earlier, more primitive Platonic sentiment still overrules the scientific insight. Poets from Horace to Poe, from Poe to Amy Lowell,

have in vain laid bare the fane. Æstheticians and psychologists, from Aristotle to Freud and from Ribot to Kostyleff, have in vain laid bare the anatomy of the machine out of which Dionysus and Apollo illusorily step. Each generation rehabilitates the mystery for itself. As Emerson writes: "The universal nature, too strong for the petty nature of the bard, sits on his neck and writes through his hand; so that when he seems to vent a mere caprice and wild romance, the issue is an exact allegory. Hence Plato said that poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand."

The perennial notion that the poet is a vehicle for something in men called Poetry by whose inspiration and power he is a poet is a notion set forth and argued anew in the most recent vindication of poetry and derogation of poets by two contemporaries of the craft. They are Ernest Graves and Laura Riding, whose books, "A Survey of Modernist Poetry," and "Contemporaries and Snobs" promulgate a fresh oracle concerning the art and its practitioners.

According to Mr. Graves and Miss Riding, there exists an Eternal Something which they call Poetry or A Poem. This Eternal Something takes possession of

the poet and utters itself through him. Why it should behave in so peculiar a way they do not explain. It is enough for them that "the poem exists before it is written," that it is absolute and can neither be born, nor grow, nor decay, nor be better or worse, as is the fate of those unfortunate events of experience which are not poems. "There is no progress of poetry any more than there is a progress of time. There is a progress of matter, but this is a permanent progress of corruption." Progress in the art of poetry, consequently, is an alteration in the personality of the poet without any effect on the character of his poem. The poet is the medium through which Poetry becomes manifest to the city of the world; the Mother Immaculate in whom that Word which is God comes to immaculate conception and is made print and dwells on earth. The perfect poet would be an utterly transparent medium leaving the white radiance of Poetry unstained: "authorship is not a matter of the right use of the will but the enlightened withdrawal of the will to make room for a new will."

2

In itself, this antiquated and curious doctrine is so commonplace an antiquity and curiosity that it would

not need to detain the attention. Croce is the last who spoke it as one having authority. Miss Riding and Mr. Graves combine with it, however, another doctrine which is the antithesis of this one. They hold that the poet who should be the transparent, passive instrument of Poetry-with-a-capital-P, must at the same time be a complete and ineffable individual, as ineffable as Poetry itself, that he must be a sort of Steinerian Ego, even more unashamed of his person than Maxwell Bodenheim, and even more idiosyncratic in his utterance than Gertrude Stein. They do not mention Maxwell Bodenheim among the practitioners of modern poetry who are signalized as contemporaries or snobs, or both, although none they do mention incarnates their ideal Poet. So far as I can see, only a personality who lives like Bodenheim and writes like Stein could be its enfleshment, their Poetic Mother of their Poetic Word made print and dwelling on earth. Everybody else, whatever school he may belong to, is a human being living in an environment to which he is sensitive and responds. His poems are his reactions to the *Zeitgeist,* to Criticism, to Science, and to all the other items of the complex of institutions, traditions, and activities of which civilization is made up. Riding and Graves, in

the rôle of law-givers to poets, however, require the poet to be responsive only to "Poetry-with-a-capital-P"; and then not really responsive but simply nonresistant to the transcendental Poetry which syphons itself through his personality. They declare that he does and must fight the *Zeitgeist* and everything else in defense and vindication of the integrity of the living, unique personality which he is. What his Poetry would be about, could the poet meet their requirements and be like God, a Person-in-a-Vacuum, they refrain from saying.

One cannot doubt the wisdom of their abstemiousness, particularly in face of the data and reasonings they use to establish their argument. Instead of unique poetic personalities working at science, criticism, or poetry and responding to the uniquely individual events of time and place and circumstance, they marshal a squad of institutional abstractions, personified through the pathetic fallacy like figures in a medieval morality play, and modern only in that the personification is unmarked by capital letters. Instead of exhibiting living experiences, they manipulate mortuary metaphysical conceptions which are not even derived from experience. And they manipulate them in order to prove and to

vindicate the very individuality which they set up to oppose to these abstractions. By means of metaphysical, sociological discussion of poets and poetry, Miss Riding and Mr. Graves purport to nullify the obvious social background and social origins of the poetic personality and the poetic imagination.

For example, Miss Riding distinguishes between civilization and barbarism. To her, civilization is a system of specialization and individuality; barbarism is merely collectivism of any sort. With the movement from the medieval to the modern world, the place and function of the poet, she notices, has been changed. The change consists in the fact that the modern poet is not included in his environment as were the poets of earlier times in theirs. To-day's poet has an appeal which is specific and limited: instead of one general audience for all poets, each poet now has his own particular audience just as each priest has his own particular congregation of devotees and each grocer his own particular concourse of customers.

Whether the historical observation be correct or not — and I regard it as obviously false — it is true that there are individual, though often overlapping, publics for individual artists just as there are individual collec-

tions of customers for individual grocers. The position of the poet in this respect is not different from the position of any other craftsman — be he doctor, lawyer, merchant, or thief, butcher, baker, or candlestick-maker. But Miss Riding deduces from this general eventuality of modern life a special piece of — to her — bad luck for the poet. It has rendered poetry, she deplores, a mere art, an insecure craft in an inimical world, ever under the duress of defending itself against competitors. Upon the poet the eventuality has imposed the task of being critic as well as poet. It has forced him away from reality and imposed upon him snobbism and the withdrawal from life. Poetry, which to her and Mr. Graves is "not a minor branch of civilization but a complete and separate form of energy ... has now," she moans, "assumed the position of philosophy," as if no such poets as Lucretius or Horace or Dante or Goethe or Shakespeare or Parmenides or Theognis or Tennyson or Fitzgerald had ever existed, and no Matthew Arnold had anticipated T. S. Eliot. It is enough merely to point out how thoroughly these conclusions contradict the premises they are derived from. To Mr. Graves and to Miss Riding the modern poet is endowed with all the attributes of the elusive ineffable Snark;

and neither their thimbles nor their care, their forks nor their hope, their menacing railway share, nor their smiles and soap can turn one up. For their Snark is a Boojum, and no contemporary fills the bill.

3

The self-contradictions which appear in the description of events — even of poetic events — have, as a rule, one or both of two sources. Of these sources the first is a contradiction inherent in the fluxful nature of things themselves. Because each thing must be born and grow up and grow old and die, its generic name must describe a multitude of opposed qualities and combative attributes. Contradiction, therefore, is its heart; its biography must be a drama of inconsistencies bound by the continuity of its living phases from its start to its finish. The other source of self-contradiction is a conflict of motives in the heart of the observer. This leads to confusion in his mind.

The biography of poetry as a succession in civilization of events of a certain kind is of its own nature full of enough dramatic confrontations and conflicts to satisfy the greediest appetite for contradiction. It does not require an added embroilment of disturbed emo-

tions in its biographers and analysts. Yet, the painful impression comes to me that this, rather than insight, is what Mr. Graves and Miss Riding bring to their discussion of poetry. Who knows what frustrations and repressions and somnambulisms lie behind their morbid insistence on "personal reality" and their quarrelsome denunciations of schools and sects? Who knows what drives them to flight from the really personal experience of making poems to a metaphysical world in which making poems is an illusion? If what they say about the nature of poetry is true, what they say about the personal reality of the poet and his relation to the world he lives in cannot be true. If their views of the unique personality of the poet and his imagination are correct, their views of the nature of poetry are compensatory rationalizations. From the point of view of living experience, a poem, like a child, is an event in a biography. It is no immaculate perfection descended from the empyrean. Its conception presupposes the impact of stimulation from the surrounding world. Its maturation in the poet's mind and its final setting down in words presuppose the idiosyncrasy of the poet's character reacting to the impact of all the forces he is able to respond to. Its publication launches it into a com-

petitive free-for-all in which other poems, publication methods, publicity, and reviewers are potent factors. Whether it will survive or perish determines itself by the same process which determines the extinction or survival of every other item in the world. No more mystery attaches to its origin and struggle for survival than to that of any other person or event.

Now a poet is a craftsman who has acquired unusual skill in the manipulation of words. Poets' mythology and critical tradition to the contrary notwithstanding, his sensibilities are not so important as his skills. A deaf Beethoven is still a greater musician than an infinitely more sensitive Pavlovian dog. Empirically, the mastery of the medium of expression has far more significance than sensitive awareness of the causes which give rise to expression. Were it not so, every Freud would be a Leonardo. One of the most persistent errors of the usual philosophies of poetry and the other arts is the belief that the meaning of the poem is identical with its cause, and that poetic utterance communicates the experience which evokes the utterance. This happens sometimes, and is often intended by poets. But far more often the gulf between that which becomes a poem and that which the poem communicates is as deep as the

gulf between the bouquet of a flower and the fertilizer out of which it grows. Empirically, poetry is a highly skilled transformation of different types of experience into verbal experience. Empirically, poetry is not a reproduction of different types of experience by means of verbal experience.

Now verbal experience is extremely complex. It has always involved the synergy of two abilities: the ability to make sounds and the ability to hear them. And since the elaboration and spread of the art of printing, verbal experience in the western world has more and more required the ability to see sounds.

To the modern, and far more intensely to the modernist, verbal sound is conditioned upon three activities of the personality: the speech-producing, the auditory, and the visual. But it is *verbal* sound for still another reason. And this reason is the sense which it makes. No verbal sound — whether addressed to the ear or to the eye — exists, which is not a sign for something other than itself. It is no news that its function as a sign can be reënforced by its nature as a sound or sight; there is an element of news in the observation that the intrinsic character of verbal sound may conflict with its significative purpose and weaken it. Until very

recently the height of poetic skill was held to lie in the perfection with which sound and sense could be fused.

And this view still prevails in respectable critical circles, in which I with small hesitation include Miss Riding and Mr. Graves. Their discussion of modernist poetry ignores precisely the specific difference in virtue of which it *is* modern. I feel their analysis of Messrs. E. E. Cummings, T. S. Eliot, the Sitwells, Paul Valéry, and others, to be acute. But I fail to find that a single one of the categories which they apply to these contemporaries is inapplicable to any poet in the long history of poetry. It is because of this generic, unindividualized significance of their categories that they are able in specific respects to assimilate Mr. E. E. Cummings to Mr. Wm. Shakespeare. They recognize that both poets aim at a compenetration of sound with sense. And the sense which the poet is ostensibly sounding is either some ineffable feeling or some philosophic vision. Sense makes sound and sound makes sense. The impression which the sound sets up in the ear is required to be if not coincident, at least continuous, with the image or meaning it communicates to the mind.

4

It need not be argued that this can be said of all poetry. What can be said of modernist poetry is another story. This story has its beginnings in the influence of the printer's art upon the poet's technique. Language used to be something spoken and heard. It is now hardly less something spoken and seen. The typographical differences between the upper and lower case letters, the shape and purpose of punctuation marks, were presumably parallel to, and signified, heard differences in the pattern, rhythm, and pitch of the spoken word. The modes of spelling and capitalization were crystallizations of social evaluations and personal attitudes toward things. With the growing use of the printed word and the development of such arts as those of the advertiser came a growing realization of the delicacies and nuances of expression which typography is capable of. As makers of advertising-display long since realized, the size and shape of letters influence the attention and emotions of their readers. Even more do their visual arrangements as black patterns on a white page. Empathy is at work. The design they compose in black and white awakens an appropriate and characteristic emotion. The heart feels as the eye is moved.

In the printing of music this situation is, of course, traditional and commonplace. The analogy in that art between the visual pattern with its meaning in sound, the correspondence of rhythm, pitch, tempo, and the like with the shapes, spacing, and position of black marks on white paper, are known to the most illiterate. They provide the stimulus to a certain synæsthesia of sight and sound. In verbal typography, however, this exploitation of synæsthesia is the modern novelty. Its earliest use by authentic poets was for comic purposes, and it has occurred in comic weeklies for many years.[1] It came into serious use when serious poets recognized on their own account that upper and lower case letters, punctuation marks, and the like, can carry emotional significances in themselves, and began to use them on that basis. An outstanding instance of such use can be observed in the work of Mr. E. E. Cummings. As Mr. Graves and Miss Riding point out, Cummings has a personal typographical system. Every letter, every comma in a poem of his has a meaning all its own. Each element must be taken into consideration and dealt with as meticulously as each element in a printed

[1] I append the one poem in the classic mode of this technique: the tale of Fury and the Mouse in Alice in Wonderland.

"Fury said to
a mouse, That
he met in the
house, 'Let
us both go
to law: I
will prose-
cute you.—
Come, I'll
take no de-
nial: We
must have
the trial;
For really
this morn-
ing I've
nothing
to do.'
Said the
mouse to
the cur,
'Such a
trial, dear
sir. With
no jury
or judge,
would
be wast-
ing our
breath.'
'I'll be
judge,
I'll be
jury,'
said
cun-
ning
old
Fury;
'I'll
try
the
whole
cause
and
con-
demn
you to
death.' "

musical composition. The result is that Cummings's poems come to us not primarily as designs in the compenetration of sound and sense but as designs in the compenetration of sight and sound and sense with the stresses all upon the sight. Each poem is a pure design in black and white whose appearance as a unit is in-

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THE TALE OF A DOG

When my little dog is happy
And canine life is bliss
He always keeps his joyful tail

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s
i
h
t

e
k
i
A-standing up l

When my little dog is doleful
And bones are scarce, you know,
He always keeps his mournful tail
A-hanging 'way d
o
w
n

l
o
w
.

Nice doggie.

— JAMES H. LAMBERT, JR.

This sample I have culled from Such Nonsense (An Anthology), Carolyn Wells, p. 149.

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tended to be, at least equally with the sound, symbolic of the sense.

In this characteristic lies Mr. Cummings' differentia as a new species of the genus Poet, as a *bona fide* modernist. The logic of his technique should lead to the use of a great variety of fonts, to vari-colored inks and vari-tinted paper. It should require him, in addition to being a critic and exponent of the *Zeitgeist* and a philosopher and all the other things that Laura Riding and Robert Graves do not like him to be, to be also a master of the typographer's art. Obviously, the potentialities here are still untouched; the surface of possibility has been barely scratched. And it may be that they are likely to remain so. Miss Gertrude Stein's endeavor to reduce words to tom-tom sound patterns and Mr. E. E. Cummings's endeavor to reduce words to spatial designs in two dimensions, and still to keep them words, cannot be said to have met with that success which points to survival. So long as words are worked as symbols and have meanings, identification between what they are and what they mean is impossible. The modernist spirit has been one which strives after this impossibility. Whether in terms of the æsthetics of Mr. Graves and Miss Riding or in terms of the "mak-

ings" of Mr. Cummings and Miss Stein, it is hunting an ineffable Snark. That kind of Snark, once found, turns into a Boojum, and its hunters softly and suddenly vanish away. Even the un-Protean snark of ordinary modernism is as rare as he is difficult to catch. And when the time is at hand that he is no longer rare, he will either have ceased to be modern, or have ceased to be.

IX. *The Quality Called Eastern*

An Address delivered before the Madison Art Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 17 March, 1916.

THERE is a quality of art to which we are accustomed to apply the adjective *Eastern*. The term is not a geographical one. Geographically, *Eastern* could mean anything that is not European or American. It could apply to the arts of Northern Africa and Asia Minor. But the works of the Moslems are no more possessed of the quality called *Eastern* than the works of Europeans, although an occasional master may attain to it, in either civilization. As a characterizing trait the quality occurs only in the works of the Chinese and their cultural children, the Japanese.

The origins of this quality are difficult to trace. Critics and historians select this or that as cause, according to their aspirations or their prejudices or both. To some it is the signal expression of race, to others

the influence of environment, to still others the voice and spirit of religion, to a few the effect of tools and materials. And so on. Authorities would be more convincing if race or environment or institutional establishments could first be isolated from their companies and then shown in the act of bringing about the effects of which they are declared to be the causes. But the fact is that no event or quality in the life of a people can be found in isolation. It seems always to occur in a constellation of contemporaries, and whether it or another of its companions in the pattern be treated as cause or as effect is either an arbitrary matter or a conventional one. And arbitrary matters are, as everybody knows, chanceful and inconstant; while conventional matters belong to the kind which sooner or later are replaced by others regarded in their turn as no less correct and no less coercive.

The truth seems to be that an adequate account of causes is here a chimera. We may not speak of antecedents and consequences among contemporaries. We merely see each contemporary as an element in a configuration with its fellows. Each of them contributes in its own way to the characteristics of the others. The relations of any one of them to the rest as individuals

and to the whole as a single united being are like the relation of players in a team. The team as a whole is their peculiar way of being together. The behavior of any player is a covariant of the behavior of each. The behavior of the team as a whole is the organic pattern of the covariations of each and every one of the players as an individual. For purposes of explanation any of them may be chosen as the center of reference for each and all of the others and for the whole team. The chosen one is then "the cause" of which the behavior of the unchosen is the "effect." But he is "cause" only in discourse. In the playing of the game each is cause and each is effect at one and the same time. There is no inevitable priority of initiating action or effectuating change. Events flow in configurations with respect to which it is not possible to say: *These make those,* or *Those make these*. The events happen presently, those and these together doing a stretch of time. Convenience and advantage only determine which shall be spoken of as *cause* and which as *effect.*

2

In discerning the quality called *Eastern* it is both convenient and advantageous to consider it with reference

to the religious mood and the otherworldly passion in the constellations of far-Eastern life.

The reason is the constant preoccupation of the fine arts, until recent years, with religious themes. Today music and painting and poetry operate to a degree as autonomous institutions. The practitioners of these arts compete with one another for public interest and profitable attention, and the clamor of their activities obscures that massive tradition of the arts in which they live and work not on their own account, but are being carried by church or state or both, as signmakers and beautifiers.

That the new independence of the arts is a better thing for them than their old retainership, no one familiar with their history would declare without reservations. Though to a modern the option between freedom without security and security without freedom is not an open one, the contrast between the institutional and personal expressions of the arts suggests that in terms of works the option is by no means a closed one. The institutional theme endows the painter's skill with a weight and dignity that individuality by itself seems able never to attain.

Among institutional themes those given out by

religion prevail; and East and West alike esteem paintings with religious significances as the most beautiful and precious. That they do so comes, however, from no inward superiority of religion over other enterprises of worth and dignity in human life. They do so because of the peculiar identification of religion with the most potent and sure tools of living, with engines and ends which have become incorporated as the enduring social values. The identification may be the fruit of a persistent illusion concerning the powers and disposition of the invisible world with whose nature and population religion is conversant. But whatever its cause, it is the main source of the strange symbiosis of religion and art which history records. Where this identification has lapsed, and the artist no longer sets forth the lives and labors of the powers of salvation, but speaks only of himself and for himself, the import of his work also lapses, and automatically. It has lost caste and status. Instead of being a public utterance it has become a personal outcry. Instead of commanding everybody's attention because by its nature it is everybody's concern, it seeks such attention as it can ballyhoo or wheedle for itself because by its nature it is a private soliloquy spoken with the hope of being overheard and the

probability of not being overheard that pertain to soliloquies.

This is why other things being equal the chances of the survival of a work of art — which survival is a matter of social selection — depend not on its merits of execution, but on the recognizable social import of its subject matter. And even to the most sophisticated mind, the matters of religion are distinguished by their ineluctable fatal import for the prosperity or failure of the enterprises of human life. The gods, the angels, the saints, the ghosts and the devils are viewed as the ultimate rulers over fullness and starvation, fertility and barrenness, health and disease, victory and defeat, a heart bowed down with trouble or exalted by peace. Liturgies and rituals, prayers, genuflections and imprecations are all designed to avert the one and to attain the other by influencing the appropriate denizens of the unseen world. Art begins so early and signifies so long because it is the one and only way which the spirit of man possesses to make these unseen powers visible. It incarnates them in earth and stone and wood, in paint and parchment and word. It fixes them in a local habitation and identifies them by a name. It enables prayer and sacrifice and ritual to take a determi-

nate direction, to address themselves to a specific personality. From the aurochs and the mammoth and the reindeer which the dawnmen incarnated by drawing upon the walls of the Altamira caves, to the divinities and demons of the Christian pantheon which Michelangelo drew upon the walls and roof of the Sistine Chapel, from those magnificent imaginings to the last image evoked on wood with paint by a Russian ikon-maker for secret adoration among militant Communists zealous for the faith, such ever have been the needs which art has served, and ever has this service been its import and the reason of its survival.

For image-making, even in our reflective and sophisticated times, continues as a utility, though nowadays more as a private than as a public utility. The arts do not maintain themselves through sheer intrinsic worth. They are either collaborators or accessories to industry or they work toward the enhancement and liberation of the stream of the common life, making it more abundant, more active, more diversified. To the sophisticated eye the direct action which can effectuate the last-named ends seems more precious than the indirect, which accomplishes them "by means of," and not straight out of itself. The sophisticated eye belongs to

a mind that has learned to acknowledge the difference between the values we set on things and the things' nature. The learning of this lesson, and the attitude consequent, are civilization.

And because civilization is such a lesson, and such an attitude, civilization is disillusion. It comes with acquiescence in the mutual independence of value and existence from one another and in the need to bring them together, with the putting of curiosity in the place of wonder, and mechanistic efficacy in place of the magic of ideals. Under civilization the task imposed since the dawn of art on the image to incarnate and control the unseen world is eventually withdrawn. Now more and more its function of facilitating the useful arts gathers significance, but most stress is placed on its rôle to utter, and by uttering, to set free, the human heart. To draw reindeer and mammoth is now to express an emotion and to envision a desire, not to manipulate an event; to dance is to purge feeling, not to cause the grain to grow. Ends and means change places. Drawing and dancing, painting and playing and singing were first actions taken in order that we might eat and drink and fight and breed. To no small degree they are still such, but more and more it becomes true

that we eat and drink and fight and love in order that we may draw and dance and paint and sing.

Yet in spite of the fact that the arts are thus secularized and power over the immediate is no longer sought by their means, the religious motive is not abolished. For in uttering the heart, the arts clarify it, in purging it, they make it aware of its secret aspirations, its brightest hopes and darkest fears. They project upon the blank canvas of the unknown the human dream of human luck and human fate, and set before the spirit of man, presently and at hand, its unreachable Beyond. Now the arts are in themselves the makers and the bearers of salvation, the safe cloister from the tumults and the struggles of the daily scene. *Art for Art's Sake* is the gospel which this religion teaches; *Beauty* is its God; the lonely heart its congregation of salvation.

Thus, it is no paradox, that to understand art, even the last cry of the present age, East or West, is to inquire after fundamental religious motives. And to inquire after these motives is to follow the light of temperament and character in the lonely soul or the community. By this light we may perceive, not ambiguously, the quality called *Eastern*.

3

If one thing is truer of the European type than of the Asiatic, it is the fact that the European makes no inward concession to his environment. Western civilization has consisted largely in the enterprises which transmute the forms of nature into the modes of man. Its spirit has been ambitious, defiant, and self-regardingly activist. By contrast the spirit of the Orient has been resigned, submissive, a surrender of its own will to the tides of time. Eastern civilization, so far as it could do so and still stay a civilization, has been an adjustment of the forms of human life to the modes of the natural scene. It has been acquiescent where the West has been rebellious, relaxed where the West has been strenuous, heedless where the West has been reaching and grasping, æsthetic where the West has been industrial, disillusioned where the West has been hopefully knowing. The gods of the West, hence, are working gods. Measured by Western standards, those of the East belong to the leisure class. We of the West pray not for the gods' sake but for our own. If wishes remain too many unfulfilled, hopes too many ungratified, shrines are abandoned and their divinities fade from life. If they will not or cannot work they shall

have no tendance. They have not earned their daily bread. Prayer and reverence seek other gods of other places, who will do for us what we wish, and so show themselves the true gods. Their truth is their works. And when these fail too, we pass on from gods to the natures of things themselves, to have our will from them. Their truth is also their works, and we call it science.

That is why the idea of progress is of Western parentage. Progress means that the powers of the world are to be harnessed to human uses, that a power which fails is not a power and is to be abandoned like a broken-down Ford; that ever more and more nature must do man's work and be the servant in his house. This holds no less of the divine immortals of high Olympus than of the submaterial electrons and radiations of machine-age science; and it holds no more of that science than of the astounding drama of man's salvation which is called Christianity.

Let us pause a moment on the latter. Christianism regards the whole world as the cosmic stage merely upon which the drama of that salvation is acted out. The rebellion and war in heaven, the fall of the angels, the creation of hell and then of the world, the making

of man with a disobedient will of his own, his sin in Paradise and consequent forever evil plight out of it, God's incarnation, His vicarious atonement for the sin of man by means of His self-chosen shameful death upon the Cross, are items of an invincible hope of the European heart. The hope is that, regardless of what now happens, the soul will in the end live happily ever after.

So to think the world and its Maker — as the merest tools designed for man's pleasure and advantage is, not obviously, but all too utterly, a piece of colossal egotism. Systematized and organized as the private views of an individual concerning himself, such a theory of life, such a religion against death, would be regarded as a paranoiac delusion and so treated. As the established vision of a society of many individuals and the orthodoxy of a civilization, it is the projection of a normal and humane aspiration for security and happiness, the manifestation of the persistent common will to control and exploit the entire infinity of nature whose most successful performance has been the sciences. Another way of saying this is the formula that the Western mind insists on getting at the world, not as the flux of forms and flow of transformations it appears to be, but

"as it really is." Science is a vision of the mechanics of nature applied to the gratification of the wishes of man.

The work of the Greeks in art demonstrates this summary of the Occidental mood as clearly as any other. If you have seen what remains of the Parthenon, or even only scale restorations or pictures of it, you must have been impressed with its extraordinary self-completeness, the beyond words adequate justness and balance of parts in so harmonious and self-sufficient a whole. The Parthenon gives you the feel of a thing that is not in any way whatever dependent upon its setting for the qualities of its being. No matter where you set it, it would be perfect and be fit. But make measurements of the elements which compose that whole, and you find that its proportion, its justness, its self-contained adequacy, is an effect to the eye, not a condition in the thing. To look right, the parts have all had to be made partly wrong. The straight-looking columns really taper; the equal spaces between them are of different sizes; the apparently horizontal floor sinks slightly toward the middle. The actual deviations of these units from straightness and proportion are adjusted to the corrective distortion of the onlooking eye, which turns the concave or convex to rectilinear, the

inclined to vertical, the bulging to straight, the inequalities to symmetry. Instead of acquiescing in the natural appearances given to perception, the Greek mind corrected nature to conform to the preferences of the eye and the arithmetic of the intellect.

Symmetrical equilibration, which is at its best in the work of the Greeks, appears to be the prevailing rule of composition in the arts of the Western world. Patterns get determined by the inertia of the eye, by the fact that it fixes upon a center of rest from which vision moves equally in any direction and best and happily when the pattern along which the movement flows is so corrected and balanced that there are neither abrupt stops, nor excessive prolongations. An impression has become a picture when the eye has cut it from its setting and defined it in this way, and the hand has corrected it to a composition in a frame. On the whole and in the long run, therefore, balance characterizes all Western art. It is preëminently revealed as clear articulated equilibrations of mutually opposed and mutually reënforcing equal values of different lines, shapes and colors. Its significance lies, not in what it reveals of the thing, but in the thing's relations corrected for the human eye or set to human uses.

The same rule holds for color "as such" in the work of "colorists." We demand that the colors of things in a picture should more or less reproduce the colors of things in their scene, suggesting and connoting practical responses; or we accept color, as in music we accept sound, for its own sake, corrected to the preferences of an eye which is moved by the passions of the heart as well. Hence we have Impressionisms, and post-Impressionisms, and all the other distortions of the unity and singularity of perceptions which are preached by our babel of sects and schools of art.

4

For none of this does the Orient contain an equivalent. In Eastern painting nature is neither imitated nor distorted. It is accepted and prolonged. Nothing is done to the impressions flowing over the sensorium from the changing scene. Their movement is received without resistance, and projected without refraction. No frame cuts them off or shuts them in. The acquiescence and self-surrender which characterize the great religions of China characterize her arts. Taoism and Buddhism are religions of disillusion as Christianity is not. Looking into the human heart, they see through its passions and

desires to the endless beyond which casts man up and then engulfs him. Taoism and Buddhism are the opposite of anthropocentric. They reject salvation as the everlasting peace and happiness of individual souls in an infinitely populous heaven. They reject individuality: *Tat svam asi* — "I am that," they announce, in a prostration of self-surrender and self-denial. They declare the illimitable unimportance of human life in the cosmic scene; they do not see man as the good of goods to possess which gods and demons struggle with each other in the flux of chance and fate. They reject effort, ambition, will, and the goal. To them, nature is attainment without striving, change without doing, action without struggle and unending, living silent peace.

What, then, is man, that the world should be mindful of him? He is no more than a louse and no less than an elephant, of a worth and dignity not different from the values pertaining to any of the orders of existence above, below or between. The stuff of him enters, carried on the wheel of transmigration, into each, into all of these forms. That he may live, one or another of those must die. And by what right shall he live, by what law must they die? Their title to be is no less than his, his no greater than theirs. Let him, then, if he

wishes that stillness which is salvation, surrender his desires; let him cease to take trouble, to want, to struggle, to impassion his heart. Let him not resist; let him submit himself to the flux. Let its movement carry him, wherever it is going to its unknown ends which are not goals, from its unknown beginnings which are not starts.

The quality called *Eastern* is the mood of these religions embodied in the arts. The rules of drawing and painting, the preference for free recollection in tranquillity as against present models presently to be reproduced, the dominance of line, the astoundingly sophisticated simplicity in the use of color — colors are not mixed but distinguished — are all consequences of this sensitive acquiescence to the movement which the innocent eye perceives even in still and massive things like mountains and great plains, large unmoving waters and windless woods. The art of China and of Japan renders, in the words of Hsieh-Ho, that master craftsman and adept æsthetician of the sixth century, "the life-movement of spirit through the rhythm of things." Its graphic symbol is the line. By means of the line drawn with the subtle bamboo brush, in black ink on white ground, it states movement, tempo, direction, mass, vol-

ume and even color. The art of China sets forth the *élan* of every being, the go and pulse of its life, the idiosyncrasy of its character, by means of the simplest unit available to the graphic arts — the one-dimensional line. It does not lack balance, but at no point is it the clear immobile tensioned symmetry which is balance among Westerners. Balance, as a constituent in the quality called *Eastern,* is a secret thing, the projection of a natural imbalance, set up by an asymmetry which is inward to the essence of all existences which move and live. It is an effect accomplished by means of the dynamic line.

How has this line been discerned, elicited from the manifold of perception and refined into the subtle and powerful tool it is? Historically, the event is connected with the character of Chinese calligraphy, and the abilities and incapacities of the bamboo brush. But with the items that make up the event goes the continuing mood which animates them and sustains them and makes a unit of them. This is the mood of the Eastern religion. The eye accepts the courses of things. It moves with their movement and is directed by their direction. The heart acquiesces in the vision of the eye. The hand utters what the heart feels. And that is the inner life

of the thing out there — of ape or dog or man, hill or plain, great quiet water or mountain stream, bird on the wing or flower on the branch, the smooth-bowing bamboo or the wind-roughed pine upon steep-set hills. They have a oneness with their themes — these Chinese! Yet, it is the essential *élan* of their subjects, "the life-movement of the spirit through the rhythm of things," and not the infinite confusion of its static detail they are one with.

This is why, I suspect, the third dimension seems so unimportant in the quality called *Eastern*. Psychologically, the third dimension is the dimension of reaction as contrasted with response. It is the dimension which imposes, which calls forth adjustment rather than prolongs movement. The will, with its passions and purposes, works in the third dimension. For it is only when objects are solid that they matter, that they coerce conduct rather than conduct vision. What else is the difference between a tree in panel and tree in the road? One catches your eye and impatterns your spirit, and the other disturbs your body and compels a complete redirection of your physical mass and a new equilibrium of your forces. The actual tree is an impact you react against; the painted tree is a kindly light that leads you

on. The first calls for practical readjustments. The second facilitates what is going already. This is why the quality called *Eastern* is the quality of a two-dimensional world, a world all flat, such as appears to a mind which sees but is not bothered and doesn't care. Lines pass into and echo each other unbrokenly in a rhythm which is like the susurrus of waves each of which is a different measure of the same movement. Boundaries that cut one thing separate from another, at the same time combine them in one continuous and patterned movement, wherein every item prolongs another, as in a musical progression. The animated diversity of the entire wide world is gathered up into a single form that is a-go without moving, at peace without arrest. It does not begin, it does not end. A frame does not cut it off, the eye's inertia does not hold it in. Yet it is all there, a serene symbol of a troubled scene.

Such is the quality called *Eastern*.

X. *The Sense of Humor as Instinct and as Reason*

I HAVE just come across Max Eastman's book on the Sense of Humor. It was fun to read, *passé* though it is. The brilliant Max, having observed that people go to laboratory reports rather than to literary disquisitions to find out the truth, and having much faith in truth, decided for the sake of truth to marry literary skill to scientific competency. The offspring of this union, which he calls a "gentle revolution," solemnized as going to work, is this book "The Sense of Humor." It is a pleasant child, favoring, so far as I can see, the literary, much more than the scientific, partner of its parentage. Not that Mr. Eastman has failed to be truly industrious. He has read, and I trust retained not wholly undigested, very nearly everything that psychologists and philosophers have written about humor. He appears to have been able to appreciate as well as

to discount their observations and hypotheses. He has been moved to give his own private description of what we laugh at and why we laugh at it, a description abounding in grace of manner and elusiveness of meaning, distinguished by much admirable writing and a moving tribute to the comic art of the less and less entertaining Mr. Charles Chaplin. He has been able to reinterpret Freud to Freud and to tell this psychoanalyst Pope his own better intention: to see much in the Kantian view of laughter and to reject the Kantian conception of it; to formulate eight rules for the jokesmith which, if Mr. Eastman would also publish the secret of how to apply them, any columnist could measure off into golden laughter. What he has to say about humor is often wise and often sweet and sometimes beautiful, and his manner of saying it has an intriguing allusiveness, a titillating ambiguity, which are sustained through the first part of his book where he speaks for himself, and the second part where he reviews his fellow scientists in the field, up to the very last chapter where he reveals his own theory in definite, identifiable terms that at last you can argue about.

Until that chapter, Mr. Eastman's theory of humor is written around and about; it is asserted, assumed and

alluded to, but never quite explicitly stated and defended as a scientist might state it and defend it. You are kept guessing. Thus, in his discussion of what he calls playful pain he writes that the "feeling of amusement is a new unique one . . . an act of welcoming a playful shock or disappointment . . . for which our nervous systems are arranged at birth as perfectly, and with as specific an accompaniment of interest and emotion, as they are arranged to greet with anger and pugnacious effort a more serious blockage of our wills. It is an instinct. And this instinct is the germ and rudiment of what we call the sense of humor." This is literature, and as literature it is approximate enough to be sensed and passed. But Mr. Eastman has made understood that what he has set down is not to be taken as merely literature. He wants it to be taken as literature which is also science. But by scientists, even psychological scientists, the illicit process of illation whereby a "feeling of amusement" gets transmuted into an instinct of humor, or even the mere germ or rudiment of such an instinct, can hardly be regarded as other than pure literature.

Nor is Mr. Eastman's formal proof of this hypothesis with which he caps his review of other peoples'

theories of humor likely to modify the psychologists' opinion. He rests this proof on the obiter dicta of MacDougall regarding instincts. He adopts MacDougall's definition of an instinct as "an inherited or innate psycho-physical disposition which determines its possessor to perceive, and pay attention to, objects of a certain class, to experience an emotional excitement of a particular quality upon perceiving such an object, and to act in regard to it in a particular manner, or at least, to experience an impulse to such action." The presence of such dispositions is declared to be signalized by three traits: the uniqueness of the emotional excitement accompanying the dispositions; their occurrence in the higher animals as well as in man; their excess or hypertrophy under particular conditions. Eastman argues that the sense of humor meets this description completely. It is "an element . . . a primary instinct of our nature, functioning originally only in the state of play." It appears early and spontaneously: we do not teach children to laugh. It is communicable through sympathy or suggestion (though it particularly depends on the "existence of a favorable atmosphere"): "no matter what one's own condition when he notices that others are enjoying a joke — whether he is tense with enter-

prise or some attempt at propriety, or whether he is relaxed and perhaps half asleep in a railroad berth — that subtle and incomparable enjoyment steals through him just the same." Its emotional quality has "perfect uniqueness." It occurs among the higher animals such as dogs, and maybe apes, but surely dogs, and of course among the mad, the drugged, the hysterical.

All of which may be so, and much of which, no doubt, is so. But its being so doesn't, unfortunately, make it an explanation of the essential inwardness of the sense of humor. Rather the opposite. It prevents explanation by referring the sense of humor to what psychologists have come to believe is a myth, a stopgap, for psychological ignorance. There is among them no agreement concerning the nature of instinct; there is no agreement concerning the criteria by which instinct can be identified. MacDougall himself differs with himself as to their number. Other and less metaphysical psychologists vary in their count from the forty of Thorndike to the four of Trotter. None of the definitions they make, so far as I can see, enables the student to distinguish instinct from habit; MacDougall's does so least of all. Take such a habit as the tobacco or the liquor habit. The use of both appears early among the

young. They do not have to be taught either; indeed, instruction is mainly repressive. Each often appears as "an independent functional unit"; either may occur among the higher animals — apes, bears, and so on; and the emotion that accompanies the activity, as smokers and drinkers will testify, is unique. Or take the language habit. Its activity as "an independent functional unit" is notorious; so is the uniqueness of the emotion that its pure exercise carries; and it appears sometimes among parrots and is inveterate among clergymen, politicians and public relationists. Furthermore, smoking, drinking, and talking are contagious. They need to be taught neither more nor less than the activities which are commonly called instincts; and the feeling or urge of them overcomes people under all sorts of conditions. They meet, as well as anything MacDougall mentions, MacDougall's criteria for distinguishing instincts; ergo, they are instincts.

"Instinct" — so far as the psychological record goes — is at the present time a substitute for observation and analysis, a convenient stop-gap for ignorance, an engine of the metaphysician and the man of letters, moralizing about human nature. Mr. Eastman, unhappily, did not carry his "gentle revolution" far enough. He should

have carried it over from the field of the humorous also to the conception of instinct. If he had, he would not have offered the unknown as an explanation of the little known. He would have found that from the very first breath the interplay between nature and nurture is too intricate and too comprehensive to make it possible properly to separate them off and to render unto Cæsar what is Cæsar's and unto God what is God's. He would have taken cognizance of the fact that the animals to whom laughter or amusement is attributed are domesticated animals, and almost exclusively those most intimately and continually in association with man. He would have noted that there is no activity of man which may not on occasion act as "an independent functional unit," and no form of behavior which does not carry with it its unique emotional flavor. But if he had noted all these things he would not so easily have had a personal theory of humor wherewith to top the collection that he reviews. And that would have been contrary to the precedent of scientific scholarship. In pursuance of this precedent, a new instinct has loomed and sunk upon the psychological horizon — the instinct of humor. This is what his "gentle revolution" has led Mr. Eastman to. Sadly, I find myself thinking of Kant's

designation of laughter. "Laughter," wrote that sage, "is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing."

2

TURNING from Eastman's "Sense of Humor" to Bergson's "Le Rire," done over into English, one runs no cachinnational danger. Bergson offers no gentle revolution. He invites a violent intuition of laughter in the setting of the *élan vital*. And almost, you accept the invitation. For the data are many and the diction persuasive. The vindicator of Creative Evolution has been as usual fortunate in his translators. There is a cockiness of expression in the English version of "Le Rire" not altogether true to the suave dignity of the original, but the matter is such that the manner becomes it. Laughter, if Professor Bergson is right, is also cocky — an impertinence, he says somewhere — and it is with the roots and fruits of this impertinence that he is here concerning himself. His tools of analysis and interpretation are the terms characteristic of the philosophy of the life-force as Bergson invented it. These are the analytic dualisms of time and space, quality and quantity, life and matter. Time, quality, and life are real and potent,

the very stuff and texture of existence: space, quantity, and matter are but negations and inversions thereof, mere appearances of the living onrush. They are reality standing on its head; something, come to nothing at all. The routine of the daily life, our social relations, our amusements, are such somersaults, such combinations of the *élan vital* with its negations — spatializations of time, intellectualizations of instinct, mechanizations of life. The exigencies of action make them so: they are our means of getting on, the soul of use, and it is by these, its means, that life maintains itself.

There exists, however, a dimension in which utilities, with their concepts and generalizations, have no worth, where intellect is satanic rather than salvational, where only concrete and living individualities count, where the *élan vital* is encountered with no veils between. In this dimension lies the field of art, which, "whether it be painting or sculpture, poetry or music, has no other object than to brush aside utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself." The older way of expressing this conventional and ancient doctrine is to say that art is intrinsic and expressive, while

what is not art is extrinsic and made up of tools only — sometimes.

The art of comedy, however, is excommunicate from the Bergsonian election. It deals not with individuals, but with types; it is external and observational, not internal and imaginative. It relies upon understanding and excludes sympathy. Only averages are its care, and the inductive sciences are its kin. For in getting its effects, its "observation is always external and the result always general." It works from the outside. And this must be, since the essence of the comic is to be a mechanization of life, a petrifaction of the labile, a mechanization and petrifaction not, however, through and through, but capable of correction and therefore to correction subject, at the hands of laughter. But that laughter's function may be universal, its object, the comic, must be general and cannot be individual. Comedy, hence, cannot reveal reality, which is all individuality and concreteness.

M. Bergson backs up this view of the comic with ample illustration. I am unable to say whether the analysis of objects of laughter is limited to French comedy from Molière to Labiche, because of his metaphysical preconception, or because such an analysis has

led to this generalization in the terms of the Bergsonian metaphysic. Certainly, what he says in addition, that laughter must concern itself with something human, in its social relations; that it must be divorced from emotion, requiring a "momentary anæsthesia of the heart," points to the view that the preconception has determined the illustrative materials, for the items of these are deducible from M. Bergson's interpretation of life and nature, while the reverse is not the case. And it is only such a deduction that would see the comic object everywhere as a "mechanization of life" — caricature, because it involves rigidity and disproportion of feature; repeated or inverted movements, because they are presumed to have, when alive, a continually changing aspect; character, because it is funny when automatism is opposed to freedom, the persistent and unconscious self-admiration of vanity to the labile and scientific cautiousness of modesty.

I believe it not at all impossible that if M. Bergson had gone farther afield for his cases of the comic; if, instead of confining himself to the comedy of literature and social life, he had sought out the occasions of laughter in nature and the other arts, he might have found it needful to modify his theory a little. Granted

that the theory lightens the cases he cites, does it equally illuminate the laughter occasioned by tickling, by fear, by victory, by release from any kind of suppression or tension? In cases of this sort is not the *élan vital* really liberated from, rather than a victim of, the contingencies of mechanization? How does the "mechanization of life" explain the comic of music, of discords of pure colors that many artists find laughable? What human or social relation is actually to be seen in these things?

Then laughter itself — is it really "unemotional"? It is true that mirth is not anger nor pity nor horror nor joy, but need it be any the less an emotion on its own account? As well deny it of any other that has an identifiable individuality. That mirth is not a negative nor depressed emotion is obvious, that it is cruel and pitiless is often true, but then so are joy and anger among the exalted emotions, and fear among the depressed ones. The "anæsthesia" of the heart is common to all emotions, to say the least — that is why they are emotions. They are selfish, central, exclusive to alternatives. They consume their object, each according to its fashion. If laughter hurts, so does anger; if mirth is blind, so is joy. And just as these are not intrinsically

corrective, neither is mirth. Arising first as an intrinsic expression of certain values in existence, it acquires a secondary character which is in no way essential or definitive of it. Its utility is an artifact, not a natural growth, and the other emotions can participate in a similar utility, for if people — off the stage — dislike being laughed at, they also dislike being stormed at or pitied, and seek to change the conditions which evoke these emotions. And if a living or anything else they prize may be won by submitting to such behavior from other people, they submit, and they like it — first for what it brings, then for its own sake. Who does not know this save the individual whose whole sense of life lies only in feeling himself the object of attentions of this order?

Now are such attentions also mechanizations of life? And if they are not, may not some of those which evoke mirth also be innocent of that rigor? In nature there seem to be many such innocents. But even if there be one only, M. Bergson's subtle and fascinating book is rendered by it a "fallacy of composition" in which one object of mirth, viz., the petrifaction of the labile, is identified with all, and in which one incidental utility is converted into constitutive function. Yet no

altogether, for at the end M. Bergson finds laughter also sympathetic, containing a "movement of relaxation," a relief from the strain of living, such as comes in dreams. And perhaps in its fundamental and deeper nature, laughter is, first and last, that; and perhaps only that.

If laughter should turn out to be, at strange last, a relaxation from the strain of living, a liberation of the spirit of man from the coercions of an environment which penalizes every least maladjustment, which is ever imposing that bondage of vigilance wisdom calls the price of liberty, then it would turn out to be also reasonable that thinkers of different strains in bondage to different and conflicting aspects of life, could excogitate different and conflicting accounts of the life and works of laughter. For each would willy-nilly see it in the light of those specific events and adventures of his biography from whose strain the saving sense of humor did in fact save him. Each would show it in that, his peculiar light, and each would confront the other with rejection and denial. The most signal testimony to the protean implications of the relaxations of laughter is that one of its most recent vindicators could identify it as an instinct, the prime antagonist of rea-

son, and one of its most subtle and persuasive students could identify it as reason, which in his view stands as polar to instinct as *cold* does to *hot.*

Instinct or Reason? — it is to laugh. . . .

XI. *The Essence of Tragedy*

PLATO, at the end of the "Symposium," represents Socrates as forcing Aristophanes and Agathon to admit that the genius of comedy is the same with that of tragedy, and that the true artist in tragedy is an artist in comedy also. The suggesion is tantalizing. Plato discusses tragedy elsewhere — its purpose to gratify audiences, the mixed character of the feelings it rouses, its place in the economy of the ideal state — but nowhere again does he touch upon the hint in the Symposium, nowhere develop its implications or draw the necessary conclusions concerning the essence of the tragic. Intent on the coördination of excellences and the definition of the Highest Good, his interest in essence was subordinate to his interest in the essence of value, and he found the arts too immoral in function to pay much attention to their right nature. Thus it is to Aristotle that the doubtful distinction belongs of being the foremost "æsthetician," the only one, indeed,

of the ancient world, and the master of those critics who maintain the classic canons of art in the modern world.

Being engaged less with morals than with nature, his empirical methods and his objective definitions made possible the formulation of the standards and descriptions of poetry without any reference to its significance for life. In consequence, where Plato was so much interested in the Highest Good that he lost all sense of the independent objectivity of good things, Aristotle was so much interested in each thing apart, including the Highest Good, that his sense of their interconnection is not obviously clear or strong. Hence, his definition of tragedy is a definition of the tragedy of Greek letters; he is concerned with the tragic institution, the playhouse and the drama, not with the world and human existence: tragedy is for him no more than an imitation, which he finds the best practice of the Hellenic stage to make, of an "action that is serious and complete, and of a certain magnitude, in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, . . . in the form of action not of narrative, through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of those emotions."

This, obviously enough, is, if we except the function of katharsis, a close characterization of Athenian serious drama; and the further specifications which the "Poetics" offers are no less faithful to the norm of the Attic stage: the character of the hero, the unities of time, place, and story — with respect to all these, description is legislation.

Succinct, concrete, objective, positive, and assured, possessed of the dry and firm flavor of reality, the very unpretentiousness of this summary of a local practice gripped the critical imagination, and became the authoritative norm for tragedy throughout Europe. It still remains fundamental. Although it was irrelevant to the practice of the ages, the religious and practical needs of the changing times giving rise to a new stage and a completely diverse dramatic tradition, although Marlowe and Shakespeare, Calderon and Lope created a new genus of tragedy, even English usage of Elizabeth's day sought the sanction of Aristotle and proclaimed his laws of tragedy eternally infallible, while his domination of the tragic stage of France was, in its classic prime, utter. Not until the gathering power of romantic feeling broke through the shell of eighteenth-

century rationalism was it considered that the great tragic poets might not have been mere bunglers, too ignorant and unskillful to make use of Aristotle's laws, but men of genius empowered to legislate and execute in their own right. Then a new definition of tragedy arose, envisaging the essential characters of modern European tradition, and in its turn giving the law, without relevancy to the changing practice of the times, to tragic art.

There is a curious inversion in these eventualities that is itself not untragic: both classic and modern drama have their source in religious needs. Both begin as mysteries, the one of Dionysus, the other of Christ. But the mystery of self-asserting Dionysus grew into the tragedy of negation we call fate-tragedy, and the mystery of atoning Christ has grown into the tragedy of affirmation we call tragedy of character. The one is lawful and orderly and classic; the essence of the other is to assert rebellion and barbarous vitality, to be romantic. And in the theory, what Aristotle is to the classic tradition, that romanticism is to the Christian. Among theorists of tragedy there have been Aristotelians and Romanticists, no others.

2

The spirit of romanticism is the spirit of adventure. It is self-centered, assured, irresponsible, eager, and spontaneous. Its pride of self is colossal, it thinks in worlds and universes, it acts as if it were God, it has no law but its own caprices, it breeds its freedom from its needs. It is nothing if not visionary and fanciful, madly so; but when its vision is coincident with reality, it reaches, by way of compensation, deeper into the heart of it and grasps more firmly the nature it sees. Such is the case with its account of tragedy. There, where classicism is formal, it is personal; where classicism is empirical, it is metaphysical. Based, no less than the Aristotelian account, on the tragedy of letters, it succeeds, nevertheless, in getting somewhat closer to the tragedy of life itself. Indeed, it aims to envisage nothing less, for romantic theories of tragedy assign to the elements of the drama a categorical nature and universal scope. This nature is disharmony, conflict at the core of being. But though the core, this conflict is not intrinsic, not permanent; rather is it incidental and transitory, a step in the self-realization of a metaphysical will. Transcendental peace broods always beyond: freedom *is* necessity, law *is* caprice. Thus, ac-

cording to Schelling, tragedy portrays the conversion, in the course of their proper growth, of the stubbornness and lawlessness of raging and inimical passions, into a horrible necessity; the poet's spirit, all the while, resting in the midst of it like a silent, lovely, shining light, the unmoved subject in the weighty movement, the wise foresight which resolves the most oppugnant discords into satisfying harmonies.[1] Hegel sees in the tragedy the reconstitution of the unity of the moral substance by an act of eternal justice which destroys the disturbing individuality;[2] Vischer, an image of the disappearance of every finite and human limitation before the infinite and absolute perfection, beside which finitude is sinful.

The rôle of sin, as might be expected where Christianism provides the funded material of thought, is indeed enormous in the romantic view of tragedy, but this sin is not religious gracelessness, it is metaphysical evil. For some it is identical with willfulness, caprice, at war with universal necessity, and defeated by being absorbed in the over-individual.[3] For others it is mere

[1] Works, I, 118.

[2] "Æsthetics," III, 530.

[3] *Cf.* Solger, "Vorlesungen über Ästhetik," 309.

finitude, arrogating to itself the lordliness of the infinite and paying, by its tragedy, the price of arrogance,[1] while for others still it is the necessary restraint of the individual will by its peers, all at war with each other, and all reduced in tragedy to absurdity, by the outspanning cosmic purpose. Sin is difference, "otherness," variation from type. Tragedy is the conflict between the typical and the individual, the former being good, the latter evil. Tragedy consists, according to Hebbel, of the representation of this conflict. The individual's passions, which oppose him to the ideal, of their own force turn into instances of domination of the moral law, and the tragic pain has its seat in this conversion.[2]

The same romantic sense of the cosmic scope of tragedy marks the disillusion of Schopenhauer and the Darwinian optimism of Nietzsche. To the former tragedy is the exposure of the worthlessness of life, its content is the horrible, the sorrow of man, and the triumph of evil. "It is a conflict of the will with itself, which here, at the highest degree of objectivity, fully

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[1] *Cf.* Th. Ziegler, "Das Gefühl," 138, and L. Ziegler, "Zur Metaphysik der Tragödie," 55.

[2] Hebbel, Works, 43, x.

explicated, reveals its terrible nature, becoming visible in the sorrows of man." [1] The inward discrepancy makes the will seem both strong and weak, and it can have no pause until it ceases to love life. Its sin is its mere existence, its salvation is death, so that it is the tragic victim who conquers, not the overawing law. Nietzsche, trying to understand tragedy in terms of an interpretation of its origins, tells the same story with a different moral.[2] The *Ursein,* overfilled with its own vitality, becomes unrestful, and creates the individual for its assuagement. When, under the stress of Dionysian music, the tragic poet reproduces these creative birthpangs of God, he gives rise thereby to the Apollonic easing. In this way tragedy reveals our own nature to us: we are visions of the Lord, celestial dissonances that must necessarily be resolved in the tragic death which is no more than the individual's reunion with the *Ursein.* Later, when the evolutionary ideal of the superman had obsessed him, Nietzsche laid more emphasis on the glory of the tragic conflict in itself. Not resolution, but the eternity of dissonance became his concern, and he therefore began to see in tragedy

[1] "World as Will and Idea," I, § 51.
[2] "Geburt der Tragödie."

a rendering of courage and the spontaneity of emotion before a powerful enemy, a horror, a sublime undoing. Now it is our victory, not our defeat, that the tragic poet selects and ennobles. "Before tragedy the warrior in us celebrates his Saturnalia." [1]

3

If we take such analyses at their face value, the difference between the classic and the romantic theories of tragedy lies in the classic sobriety of statement and its emphasis on form, the unities, and embellishments, in the ordering of the content rather than in the content as such. For both, the tragic essence is action or struggle, and the one finds its formal, the other its material nature to be of supreme importance. Both tend to insist on the lofty station and nobility of the tragic protagonist, but classicism finds his misfortune to be largely unmerited; romanticism sees it as the outcome of metaphysical sin. Both find an irrevocable finality in the tragic conclusion, for both it is as the "Sire, Zeus, willed it long ago," for both there is the peace that lies beyond. But to the classicist this peace

[1] Works, VIII, 136.

is the fruit of katharsis, conceived, perhaps, physiologically[1] and naturally, while for the romanticist it is the peace that passeth all understanding. But from the romantic standpoint the struggle is cosmic, hence its essence appears in *any* struggle, and the peace may ensue upon any sad event. As Lipps says, the protagonist may be a morally poor and bad man. It is the imperative and categorical nature of his misfortune that constitutes his tragic nobility, not the nobility his misfortune. In the tragedy of the playhouse, of course, the nobility of the protagonist is that of the classic drama: he *is* a king, not by virtue of his unhappiness, and most of the romantic theories had in mind the Attic models of romantic dramas. Nevertheless, the vision of romanticism is truer to all of the facts, for it can readily envisage the tragedy of the daily life, where the conflict is essential and the station of protagonist unimportant.

Even so, however, can it be said to apprehend the right essence of all tragedy more truly than the classic theory? Do both together? What, in the light of them, shall we make of that pregnant hint of Socrates con-

[1] *Cf.* the discussion of music in the "Politics" of Aristotle.

cerning the identity of the genius of tragedy with that of comedy? or of the remark of Ibsen to the effect that contradiction, namely, "the contradiction between power and effort, will and possibility, constitutes the tragedy and *also the comedy* of the race and the individual?" [1] In point of fact, in their emphasis on conflict, or on form, or on nobility of character, these theories have not grasped the distinctive essence of tragedy. What they say of it may be said of comedy also. For the comic, the ludicrous, is also not at rest, is also an action and developing process, having also a title to unities and embellishments. It, too, is a disharmony whose wholeness is the wholeness of a flicker. In it, too, something is lost or destroyed. But significantly, what is destroyed is not a thing of worth: the progression of the comic theme alters the relations of its elements, gradually eliminates the evil which fathers the unrest, leads to the peace beyond, and in so doing enhances the valuable and confirms the stability of what is precious. The comic conflict tends invariably to resolve into the adequate harmony of beauty; in it evil yields to the supremacy of excellence, and it is sus-

[1] Foreword to "Catalina," 2d ed. Italics mine.

ceptible to the same metaphysical and romantic significances usually invoked for tragedy, and occasions no less than tragedy, a purgation.[1]

If this be true, then there is no reason to believe in a difference between comedy and tragedy with respect either to material or to scope of movement. The subject-matter of both is essentially one. What moves one man merrily will move another tearfully; it may be comic and tragic to the same mind at different times and to different minds at the same time. The daily life offers no occasion that cannot sustain these inverse relations; art holds innumerable examples of such objects. Once madness, intoxication, greed, personal deformity were comic; to-day they are tragic. The comic character is often lofty, his misfortunes are frequently unmerited. Alceste in "Le Misanthrope," Celia and Bonario in "Volpone," Orlando in "As You Like It," Hermione in "A Winter's Tale," and innumerable others are in and of themselves no less worthy the buskin than the sock. Nor is the tragic conflict of greater categorical import than the comic; for the op-

[1] For a detailed analysis of the comic *cf. American Journal of Psychology,* April, 1911: "The Æsthetic Principle in Comedy," by H. M. Kallen.

position of society and the individual, law and caprice, nature and convention, the temporal and the eternal, are comic oppositions no less than tragic. And the great passions — egoism, avarice, hypocrisy, jealousy, ambition, stupidity, conceit, love, treachery — are they less effective engines of events in one than in the other?

Nothing, perhaps, is so free as the interchange of the two sentiments, tragic and comic. It is the significance that alters, not the object. "Titus Andronicus," full of horrors, once a potent tragedy, is now ludicrous through just this replete intensity of horror. Kyd's "Spanish Tragedy," written to be a great purge of the soul by pity and terror, now tends to evoke only our laughter. "The Merchant of Venice," intended to split the ears of the groundlings with laughter, is now a tragedy moving our tears and consideration, while it is not unlikely that the whole heroic stage of the Restoration would awaken only derision. Moreover, there are border-plays, just as there are border events in the daily life, which leave us uncertain whether to laugh or weep, in which the tragic and the comic sentiments pass into each other as rendering, mood, situation — in a word, the mind's valuation of the event — may determine. Such dramas are Molière's "Misanthrope,"

which Goethe called a tragedy, his "Tartuffe" and "George Dandin." Such are Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure," "All's Well That Ends Well," "A Winter's Tale," and "Much Ado." Such are Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" and "Little Eyolf." And these are only notable and obvious instances.

Ultimately there is nothing in experience or in literature that cannot, as the occasion is served, move to laughter or to tears. Altogether, the mechanism and structure of the comic plot is the same as that of the tragic plot, even according to the Aristotelian analysis. Both involve specific conflicts, disharmonies brought to pass by recognition, exposures, inversions, repetitions, and so on. Whatever that is human and contains the dramatic essence of the comic by that fact contains the same essence of the tragic — let it be deformity of person or of character, cancers of body or spirit, let them appear singly or combined into groups, systems and progressions, they with indifferent immediacy constitute the tragic optimum, or the comic. Not a detail of the one that cannot become the substance of the other without a change in nature. Where then does the constitutive alteration come?

4

Consider so commonplace a comic event as Mr. Pickwick in pursuit of his hat. Is his situation truly comic to him? Does he or can he stand outside it, the joyous spectator of the mutual defeat and destruction of elements in his environment which were menacing, potential of evil? Clearly not. Even his initial laughter (if he be moved to it) is unfree and therefore not truly the voice of the comic sentiment. For it has an instrumental intent; it is meant to ward off the pain of the greater derision from the watching crowd, which anger or bad temper on his part would evoke. It does not endure, this initial laughter, inasmuch as its source cannot remain the serene beholder of his own undoing, nor can his mirth be honestly directed upon his present state. In his eyes the pursuit of his hat is an urgent and serious business, and as it prolongs, passes from seriousness to sadness and from sadness to tragedy. By it the even course of his life has been broken, its proper balance destroyed and the flow of his interests deployed from its right channel. The hat-hunt is a node and vortex of cross-purposes, arrested progress, and its prosecution involves at the same time neglect of the right and good and the pursuit of them; it is an attempt to restore

these excellences to their pristine status. Further, for the permanence of this status, in a society where headgear is important, the right disposition of the hat is fundamental, propriety in dress being there a human interest and value which is in many respects the base and underpinning of innumerable more and important and higher interests.

The very triviality and obvious ridiculousness of the instance must make clear beyond question how near together laughter and sorrow do lie. To violate this apparently insignificant interest of propriety is to throw the others out of gear, to upset a system or scheme of values. The chance wind, then, in carrying off a man's hat, makes him the victim of such an upheaval and loosens his grasp upon life and power. In his struggle to regain his hat he is in toils of evil, and he is thereby a tragic figure. Tragic because the doom which ordains him here to maladjustment, or defeat, or destruction, is his own nature. It is the inexorable and spontaneous necessity of living which compels him to pursue his lost good, to restore the upset equilibrium, to protect the threatened value. If it be possible for the man to go freely on his way without his headgear, he can never figure as tragic, nor as comic either. As it is, his plans

and the arbitrariness of fate or chance being oppugnant, his expectations are disappointed, his aims are missed, the worth and inward dignity of his life are set at naught. And all this is to the beholder comic and yields him self-sufficiency and pleasure. But to the man himself, can it be anything but an increasingly terrible insufficiency and horror, rendering him tragic? And if this be the ready menace of so insignificant an incident as a hat-hunt, how much greater must be the tragedy in the more meaningful events of experience. For our hatless citizen there is a world out of joint whose cursed spite requires him to set it right.

"The world," says Horace Walpole, "is a comedy for those who think and a tragedy for those who feel." It is the same world, but it feeds the proper vitality of the one, and he laughs and grows fat, while it consumes that of the other, and he dies. Valuation is what makes tragedy. And it is for this reason that comedy is tragedy, tragedy comedy, seen the other way. If comedy involves detachment, tragedy requires attachment. Where comedy supplies superiority, tragedy demands loyalty, where comedy begins with menace, the beginning of tragedy is beauty. Comedy annihilates the rival, tragedy destroys the beloved. For every loy-

alty, every appreciation or attachment, all love, is, as we know, but the interweaving of value-relations by whose virtue objects get each its peculiar excellence. This excellence may be the direct and all-absorbing one of beauty; it may have the indirect character of instrumentality, mechanical or ethical, being good in respect to its uses rather than in its own right, or it may be possessed of the high and full dignity of the harmony of the two. But if there is to be tragedy, it must exist, and in some one of this triad of forms. Where there are no values, there can be no interests and no tragedy. That can arise only where a thing precious and cherished is involved in ruin: a thing dear to the soul, its care and joy. Whatever other characteristics tragedy may have, its prime essential is the destruction of value, and from that all the others derive.

5

That the heart of tragedy should be destruction of values is implied in the nature of value itself. Being of the very essence of consciousness, the core of humanity, its disintegration must proceed through a human center, and tragedy of the unhuman is possible only as a secondary and symbolic fact, humanized by an in-

fection from the soul of man, a pathetic fallacy. This does not mean, as Lipps would have us think, that the tragic sentiment is *Mitleid,* sympathy or pity, or that it is value of the highest type, being the feeling of the worth of man as such. Nor does it mean that tragedy's excellence resides in the painfully sublime participation in the inmost life of another through the medium of his difficulties.

My meaning is rather the other way. Pain is exactly what does not lead to personality, it is personality that leads to pain. For instance, consider again the relation of the onlooker to the hat-chasing victim of the wind. If the two are strangers utterly, if they do not obviously meet on any one excellence, each feels the other as somehow a menace to his own integrity of being. The stranger within the gate is ever in need of protection; "who is not for me is against me" seems to be the operative though unacknowledged rule of conduct of our gregarious world. The stranger's misfortune is sooner if not immediately felt as an excellence — as the frustration of a potential menace; and this feeling's overt symbol is laughter. But if, on the

[1] For Lipps's view of tragedy, *cf.* Æsthetics, I, 565.

other hand, two are not strangers; if, although for an instant only, an interest of each touches and strengthens the other's; then the hat-hunt becomes the spectator's tragedy also. He participates in the ruin: a value of his, however petty, is for the moment in jeopardy of its existence through the hat's mischance. That value may reside in the intrinsic character of the victim himself, in his appearance merely, in his affairs, in any one of the complexity of interests that make up our lives. Once given and endangered, tragedy arises, excellence becoming transmuted to turpitude, goodness falling into the toils of evil. Now there are nonhuman conflicts and disharmonies also, there are discords of color, cacophonies of sound, natural cataclysms, misfortunes of animals, metaphysical evil, which are readily objects of laughter: but contents of the tragic sentiments they can become only by virtue of the "pathetic fallacy." Some form of value — in a word, some attribute or *quale* of consciousness or personality — must attach to them, be involved or shattered in their fall, and their ruin must in so far forth drag the spectator down with it. In some one respect it must be his ruin, his unhappy destiny.

Since the field of excellence is narrower than experience, the menace of existence being at least so pervasive as its joy, tragedy has a scope more limited than comedy. The tragic spirit lives by the misfortunes of man alone; the muse of comedy is nourished on all disharmonies. Tragedy, as an art, does not reach out to the residual world, but stays at home in the human heart. Whatever has figured as tragic, from God to stocks and stones, has been so only by its propitious bearing on some human interest, and has sucked its tragic import from that. Until very recently there have been no attempts at tragedies of beasts and things, and such experiments as had been made were foredoomed to failure. The material whereon we feed and live can be of itself comic, but it cannot of itself be tragic. To achieve tragedy it needs to be raised to man's estate, made to care for the same things and to cherish the same values. Then, however, it is no longer tragic in its own right but vicariously, as Chanticleer may be, or the birds and beasts of Æsop, or the animal gods of the mythologists. Tragic in its own right only mankind can be, and all else is an image and a symbol merely, not a real life, the peer of man's.

6

But because the prime fact of valuation narrows the field of the tragic to humanity, it does not limit the sentiment to those classes of mankind defined by both the classic and romantic theories of tragedy. If in the tragic conflict the very core of life is thrust at, if it is value as such that is there gauged it is value uninformed by any object, independent of any condition, caste, or station. Now bare value so taken is fundamental, is that direct excellence, intrinsic, immediate, self-sufficient, which is so often identified with beauty, so that beauty becomes the chief desideratum in tragedy. Here would seem to arise one of those paradoxes dear to romanticism — the limited becoming unlimited, the relative absolute, and so on to no end. At least, there seems to be a contradiction: the tragic object must be beautiful, yet must belong to no special human group.

What of the blind, the halt, the twisted? what of all ugly humanity? Does not that make a difference, and could not comedy and tragedy be distinguished, after classicism, with reference to ugliness and beauty? Comedy, Aristotle tells us, is of the nature of the ugly, but tragedy must be adorned with every artistic ornament and its characters must be kingly. On the con-

trary, modern insight, of which the moral disillusions of Christianity and the spontaneous democracy of romancticism are a dominant spiritual background, has ceased to find tragedy only where ornament is pervasive and station significant. It is valuation that engenders beauty, and that beauty need be unmixed still needs to be proved. Ugliness is endured, as we shall see, and even cherished for the sake of the value it lives with. Again as Lipps says,[1] and again, for another reason, morally poor and bad men may be tragic protagonists, men without station, dignity, or worth, but loving life and seeking to conserve it.

Let alone the domestic tragedy so recurrent on the English stage, there are also truly sordid tragedies, like those of Hauptmann, where the splendor of destruction is nil, the embellishment lacking, the nobility of the victim unrevealed. In them no magnificent recollections of bygone days wait upon death, no hells loom, no gods curse, no hosts of angels sing to rest; the evil event comes unbeautified and passes unembellished, the tragic figure has neither high station nor exceeding virtue. It is the figure from the depths of daily life,

[1] For Lipps's view of tragedy, *cf.* Æsthetics, I, 566.

with all its dreariness, with all its imperfections, but with its essential value — with its *life*. It is the figure of the daily life given, in an enhanced degree, the beauty which is life, the joy proper to being, to the maintenance of interests, the pursuit and participation in ideals. However commonplace and routinal this figure be, it becomes tragic when any of its positive values, wherever sustained and from whatever social reach declining, grips in its passing the onlooker's heart, and so, by becoming his own, carries him along to destruction. Neither fear nor pity nor heroic guilt nor embellishment nor station is, then, at the base of tragedy. At the base of tragedy is the goodness of mere life, expressed as the most obsessive of all values, beauty.

Hence, limited though it be, the tragic field has widened since Aristotle's day. From kings it has spread to all mankind, from a few values, given in religion or the more vivid taboos of a dearly gained morality, such as made Pentheus and Œdipus tragic figures, it has spread to all the values that men cherish and lose, whether through their own natures or through the brute onsweep of the flux. The "gravity and greatness" of the tragic career is no longer the gravity and greatness of the convention of implicated gods and suffering

heroes. There may be tragedy in the fall of the sparrow, if there are men who love sparrows. Tragic significance now rests in intent purely as it lives in the moment of perception, and is identical with beauty as we have learned to know it, at its elemental simplest, the naked fundamentum of value. This, the soul of all our interests and acolyte of every excellence, attaches us spontaneously to an object in the flux, and raises it to the region of the spirit and sustains it there. The object need only be selected or found. Beyond that it may be companioned by a horde of evils, born of evil, dependent on evil, yet for its goodness's sake these will be not only endured but also sustained and cherished. The infection of its excellence will overcome the very horror that may surround and feed it, and turn all to good. Thus, however great the turpitude and sinfulness may be, however ineradicable save by annihilation, its destruction will, by virtue of the good it lives with, be also tragedy. Such destructions are those of Macbeth and his lady, of King John, of Richard III, of Werner. Camille, Iris, Paula Tanqueray, Rosa Bernd are considered no less tragic than Cordelia and Desdemona. Thérèse Raquin and Hannele are found as worthy of the buskin as Antigone or Iphigenia.

With respect to the intrinsic dignity of life, the slum is as worthy as the palace; millhands, spinners, thieves, are as excellent in their proper natures as captains and lords. Indeed, what in the old tragedies the gods were to the heroes, that the upper classes are now recognized to be often to the lower. In plays like Tolstoy's "The Powers of Darkness," Sudermann's "Die Ehre," Hauptmann's "Die Weber," moreover, the groups as such are the protagonists, and individuals are merely background. Nor is the "law" or the "god" always vindicated now, or the individual invariably resolved into the universal. The tragic object may be the god or the law or the universal itself. This is so in "Ghosts," where a time-honored convention of human mating is destroyed; in "A Doll's House," where the obligation of family life and duty lies dismembered and bleeding. In a word, the tragic sentiment has been liberated, and will attach itself to any excellence of life whatever, involved in disharmony and going down to destruction.

The classic drama itself furnishes examples of how natural and inevitable this is. Indeed, it is only an accident of history that this extension of the tragic field did not occur a thousand years ago. It requires no more

than the development of implicit attitudes of the chorus or of the protagonists of the Attic stage. A notable instance occurs in Euripides's "Bacchæ." Cadmus has been bemoaning his unhappy fate and the leader of the chorus replies:

Lo, I weep with thee. 'Twas but due reward
God sent on Pentheus; but for thee. . . . 'Tis hard.[1]

The admission of Dionysian justice is pitying, grudging. The speaker is expressing two conflicting sentiments, loyalty to the god and pity for Cadmus. Suppose, however, that Euripides had been even more Platonic in his treatment of the divine immoralities. He might then have thrown the whole force of interest on Pentheus and Cadmus, even for the Dionysian choir, and instead of justice, the speaker of these verses might have seen immorality and horror in the god's revenge. On the other hand, the relation of the comic sentiment to the tragic is no less pregnantly implicit in this passage. For Euripides might easily have maintained the initial joy of revenge and triumph which the prophetic chorus expresses, instead of permitting it to lapse so

[1] Translation by Gilbert Murray, p. 150.

humanly. Pentheus was outraging their beloved gods; his failure and his fate could easily have been laughed at rather than sighed over, and if he had succeeded in his blasphemous designs, not he but Dionysus would have been the tragic hero. Similarly, in the Sophoclean version of Prometheus, to those who felt Zeus as more important and of greater excellence than the Titan, the tragedy must have been Zeus's. And in our time the death of Macbeth is to many more painful than the death of Duncan, and the fate of Beatrice Cenci's father than her own. To multiply examples would be superfluous. Tragedy rests in the first instance upon the destruction of values.

7

This cannot, however, be the whole story. The tragic sentiment is a complex one, and alone the destruction of value would give rise to horror, hardly anything more. True horror is not, however, a constituent of the sentiment. This is predominantly pleasant, luminous and calm rather than passionate and turgid, and with all the attachment and suffering, it leaves the soul somehow detached, free, even if subdued. That there are tragedies which do not involve this

fullness of the tragic sentiment, which are valued only in terms of pity and terror, or even of terror alone, is not disputed. That whole group of dramas called "tragedies of fate" may belong to this class. The horror of Œdipus, the inevitable but needless deaths of Romeo and Juliet, the suicide of Phædra and the killing of Hippolytus, the fates of Othello and Desdemona, may be held to be the fruits of evil purely, utter reversals of values, spanned by horror. In the course of the daily life they would be paralleled by the fearful accidents, — children under wheels, the ruin of shipwreck, the rack of earthquakes. The evil in them would be just the brute irrationality of being, the heedlessness and inadvertence of the flux. Whatever positive excellence is apprehended together with such misfortunes resides not in the fearful content as such, but in other and not altogether relevant excellences — the proper embellishments of tragedy.

The tragedies of fate are, however, really not so simple, and most of them do exemplify the tragic sentiment. This, with its mixture of positive and negative values, pleasantness and unpleasantness, can rightly attach to nothing but the event itself, to its development

and culmination, not to its extraneities. If tragedies of fate are truly objects of the tragic sentiment, they necessarily involve more in their content than their theory envisages. The sentiment is, as Lipps thinks,[1] a unique and single emotion, although its positive character is not intensified by its negative complement, nor does it appear to be derived from the apprehension of the inmost depths of humanity through suffering. A mood, it makes no judgments of kind or class; it requires only that the object it defines shall be involved in some cataclysm of value. But what else is necessary in the nature of the cataclysm to render it completely tragic?

The thing needful is that the destroyer of values shall itself be a value.

The right essence of tragedy lies not in the demolition of value merely, but in the destruction of value by value. Its movement is a conflict between values, its culmination is the victory of one of them. The hero and his enemy, whether in the tragedy of fate or of character, must be equally good if the tragic sentiment is to establish them as tragic figures. The verse already quoted from the Bacchæ is a consummate expression of this sentiment:

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[1] Æsthetics, II, pp. 572-3.

Lo, I weep with thee. 'Twas but due reward
God sent on Pentheus; but for thee. . . . 'Tis hard.

And in Macbeth's response to the announcement of his wife's death it sounds the depths:

SEYTON—*The queen, my lord, is dead.*
MACBETH—*She should have died hereafter:*
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

In both these instances, there is, it will be seen, a pause in the movement of events, a sort of peace, that comes with culmination. The battle and the breath-

lessness are done; the fever and the fret are at an end; only the fruit remains, a sorrow and a consolation in one. To the Bacchanal the supreme excellence has been the honor of Dionysus; that she lived by, that it was her interest to sustain and to glorify. She has found, however, in the aged Cadmus another excellence; his lamentations have moved her, his loss has become her loss, his tears her tears. Pentheus, the last of the Cadmean race, the old man's champion and his friend, has also become something to sustain and cherish. But Pentheus is gone irretrievably. The world could not hold together him and Dionysus; one or the other must be the victim of the tragic conflict. All this the Bacchanal recognizes and envisages in her last speech — an excellence has been destroyed, a star has fallen, but it had to be; and there remains the residual good — God's justice which by destroying the man, preserved itself.

So compounded also is the sentiment of Macbeth. Busied with his preparations for the approaching battle, requiring hopefulness and abundance of life, he receives instead a message of death. His instantaneous response thereto is one of rebellion and suffering: it is an untimely death. But over against this sense of dis-

harmony and loss rises the other consideration of the emptiness and vanity of that which he so much lacks and regrets. Life, more life, indispensable for the purpose in hand, in itself not worth the living! Evil and good are inextricably commingled, and the one is born of the other. "Out, out, brief candle!"

Tragedy exists wherever goodness is at war with goodness, nobility with nobility, truth with truth, in battle for a mere place in existence, a battle which both cannot survive. "Das Gute selbst kann Feind des Guten sein, die Rose kann die Lilie verdrängen wollen; beide sind existenzberechtigt, aber nur eines hat Existenz." [1]

Such conflicts arise everywhere, and are the constituent matter of the whole drama of human life. They are the fabric of the mind of man, so that every moral nature has its roots in the tragic essence. For mind, as we have learned, is an arrangement or system of interests, each accommodated to the others, and in the accommodation some are crippled, some are dwarfed, some are completely annihilated that the whole may be. Yet in the way of being, each value in itself is as validly entitled to a freehold in existence as any other, each is

[1] Hebbel, "Tagebuch," 7 Dez., 1839.

as possible and autonomous a happiness, if it come to fruition. In the freest and most excellent life, where no environment would constrain, no pain contradict and demolish, each, in reaching its proper perfection, would enrich and deepen the harmony of its peers, while they in their turn would support the individual interest.

But the mind is not single, whether in purpose or passion. It is a manifold of conflicts far more than a unity of peace. In the flux and strain of living, the autonomy of existence and freedom for perfection that are spontaneously proper to each interest must give way to the domination of law. That many may be, one at least must pay. So only can the moral economy be maintained; but the moral economy so maintained, is implicit tragedy. Every choice is a destruction of value by value. The soul, it seems, must, in her housekeeping, waste to save, and what she wastes is initially as costly, as precious, as desirable as what she keeps. Indeed, the very freedom which is granted her in the existence of alternative excellences to choose between is the substance of her tragedy. Where freedom is not, where there are only uniformity, fate, "overarching purpose," and the difference and spontaneity are lack-

ing or unreal, there can be no struggle and no tragedy. Growth in liberty, the enfranchisement of values as they rise in all men, means growth in tragic power. For this reason tragedy, in no less profound a sense than comedy, attends civilization, which is the liberation of the human spirit. For these reasons these converse values melt, in the development of the dramatic arts, one into the other, to merge into the neutrality of humor, the clearly diverse tragedy and comedy of Sophocles and Aristophanes culminating in the undeterminate and problematic dramas of Ibsen, which are tragic or comic as one chooses.

8

Tragedy enters the arts whenever any inimical and oppugnant goods are abstracted from their context in the flux of experience, and the progress of their duel to its culmination is made the overruling theme of a tale. How deep-lying and inevitable such conflict is, how far-reaching, how finely woven into the texture of our own lives, the very honor and dignity which mankind apportions the tragic art, sufficiently attest. And not alone the high dignity of tragedy, but the added traits which

criticism has regarded as its essentials, distinguishing it from comedy — reality, categorical force, embellishment. These are, nevertheless, not primary, and if they exist in tragedy, derive from that more fundamental thing — the warfare of values. Since, moreover, the tragic object may at the same time be also comic, its nature and qualities cannot be more real as the one than as the other. If, when comic, it seems abstract, unreal, mere "personification" of moral traits,[1] this is because, emptied by virtue of the comic conflict of its own power for evil, it is *felt* as trivial, unimportant, negligible. Its value makes it unreal, the laughter that depreciates it, not its nature. Its value again makes it real, and love or loyalty that cherishes it and renders its endangerment tragic. The mind, by prizing and treasuring an object, whatever its status, endows it with genuineness and import such as it cannot and need not otherwise have, renders it solid, stable, significant. In a word, in comedy the value ensues upon the struggle, feeds upon that, but is not involved in it, while in tragedy it is value itself that is embattled and in danger of destruction.

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[1] *Cf.* Bergson, "Le Rire."

From this fact springs the notion also of the "universality" of the tragic protagonist, as well as of his reality. There is, in the tragic sentiment, something of finality, of the irrevocable, the fatal and necessary. This is the material of the cosmic resolutions of dissonance, of the absorption into the One, which the romantic interpreters of tragedy are so rich in. But it is born of nothing more than the event that the tragic duel is between two excellences which cannot endure together. One or the other must be annihilated, and forever. And the poignancy of recognizing this unutterable incompatibility and inevitable bereavement seems no less than universal. It is like the past, which cannot be called back, yet without which we cannot live. If, then, tragedy is categorical and necessary, the universality and necessity are the fruits of its primary content and its essential "terror" lies in that. For in that we see evil springing out of the very being of goodness, the love of excellence frustrate by its own nature. Tragedy reveals the subtlety, the pervasiveness, the invincibility of the enemy, "how evil evil is," as Mr. Santayana says. But tragedy is also a tribute to the power of life and preserves intact the domination of goodness. For it is

better that one value shall flourish and bear fruit than none at all. What survives the tragic ruin is still a thing to cherish and to love, the more precious for the price it costs.

In sum: the two historic theories of tragedy, the classic and the romantic, do not succeed in supplying a definite criterion of its nature. Although both enumerate many of its properties, they fail to distinguish such as will differentiate it from the comic on the one hand, and the horrible, on the other. With respect to singleness and unity of action, to purgative effect (even through such emotions as pity and terror), to subject matter, to the passions and motives of protagonists, to the mechanism and structure of plots, comedy is essentially identical with tragedy. The history of literature records tragedies that have become comedies and comedies that have become tragedies, and the daily life teems with events that are tragic to one and comic to another, while dramatic art offers plays that are tragic or comic as the interpretations of the actors and the moods of the audience please. Again, the horrible, which is essentially blinding and turgid, can play no important rôle (to say nothing of being identical with

it) in tragedy, inasmuch as the tragic sentiment, subdued and massive though it be, is also speculative and not unquiet.

The reëxamination of the tragic essence to which these considerations lead reveals the fact that the one trait which makes the destruction or pain of an object tragic, not comic, is its *value,* and that its enemy must be equally a value. But value is meaningless except in terms of mind, whose essence value is. So that only human beings can be tragic and all other things are tragic vicariously. In life and in art, tragedy can exist only where human values are incompatible and cannot live together, one having to go if the other is to stay. From the fact that the tragic object must be valuable, spring the so-called universality of tragedy and the "reality" of its protagonists. Its high place among the arts, again, is due to the fact that it is more directly representative of that inward conflict which is the life of a mind whose whole biography is a continuous choosing between incompatible goods. Nevertheless, tragedy represents the victory of life, since it is better to conserve one or a partial excellence than none at all. It is, however, rooted in destruction, and where com-

edy is the *enrichment,* tragedy is only the *salvage* of life.

The foregoing account of tragedy may be called pragmatic.

THE END

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